WREN'S NEST
AND OTHER POEMS

T. Y. COOPER

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WREN'S NEST:

A FAIRY TALE IN VERSE

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

T. Y. COOPER

Thomas Y. Cooper

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WREN'S NEST AND OTHER POEMS

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TO

THE BLESSED MEMORY

OF A GREAT AND GOOD

MOTHER

I DEDICATE MY HEART

AND

THIS BOOK

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ROAD TO ELFINLAND

AND SEE NOT YE THAT BONNY ROAD,
WHICH WINDS ABOUT THE FERNIE BRAE?
THAT IS THE ROAD TO FAIR ELFLAND,
WHERE YOU AND I THIS NIGHT MAUN GAE.

—BALLAD OF THOMAS RYMER.

THOMAS OF ERCELDOUNE:

HIS INSCRIPTION

I.

My Princess Really-Truly, this is only truth I know:
I love you, loveliest of mortals here on earth below.
I who have lived with fairy folk and am come back to tell
Sighed not so deep for Christenland as I sigh beneath your spell.

II.

I've gazed on charmed enchanted pools in far-off Elfin vales,
But their gleams were not as dangerous when the taken footstep fails
As all the deeps of your hurtful eyes beneath long lashes that shine—
And oh! the soul that's drowning there is mine, beloved, is mine.

III.

The planets hung in ouphant skies reflect
a paler light
Than your rapturous moonbeam glances and
smiles so warm and bright,
And the soft, cool, silken shadows thridded
in and out your hair
Are twice and thrice as perilous as mystic
winding stair.

IV.

No lilies grow in Elfin close to match your
finger tips;
No roses like the carmine bud that is your
rosy lips;
And I tremble at the thought of what were
life's supremest bliss:
The daring sweet proximity would melt
into a kiss.

V.

Like tremulous bells that number the hours
where Queen Titania reigns
The magical lilt of your utterance sends a mad-
ness through my veins;
The fairy rings of memory intrigue me
night and day:
I only know that you are near or know that
you're away.

VI.

I love you for your intimate self, so colorful
and warm;
I love you for the naiad airs that float about
your form;
I love you for the queen you are among the
daughters of Eve,
And for the nameless spirit in you I cannot
take nor leave.

VII.

I love you morn and even: every time and
every place
With my full strength of heart and soul I
visualize your face;
The sprightly dancing shape of you, your
sparkling lips and eyes,
They are the matter of my dreams and sub-
stance of my sighs.

VIII.

I love you more than man does love or aught
of mortal birth;
I love you with a love transcending passion
born of earth.
My love is loftier than the skies and deeper
than the sea,
It scales the barriers of high heaven and
fronts eternity.

IX.

I love you more than all the angels round
about God's throne;
I love you more than all the saints all the
worlds have known;
I love you better than the Good Book and
the words therein;
I love you and I love you so I fear it is a
sin.

X.

Your name's a prayer upon my lips while I
have life for breath;
I can no more banish thought of you than I
can banish death;
I love as surely as the sun each day wings
down the west,
And at a word I'd fly to you like bird unto
his nest.

XI.

I love you as the bee the flower, and as the
flower the rain;
I love you more than all on earth and love
you yet again.
O rather that the burning sun and stars for-
get to shine
Than you should scorn, bright star, dear dust,
sweet woman, to be mine!

WREN'S NEST:

A Fairy Tale in Verse

"DORT HAT EINST EIN SCHLOSZ GESTANDEN,
VOLLER LUST AND WAFFENGLANZ;
BLANKE RITTER, FRAUN UND KNAPPEN
SCHWANGEN SICH IM FACKELTANZ.

"DA VERWUENSCHTE SCHLOSZ UND LEUTE
EINE BOESE ZAUBERIN,
NUR DIE TRUEMMER BLIEBEN STEHEN,
UND DIE EULEN NISTEN DRIN.

"DOCH DIE SEL'GE MUHME SAGTE:
WENN MAN SPRICHT DAS RECHTE WORT,
NAECHTLICH ZU DER RECHTEN STUNDE,
DRUEBEN AN DEM RECHTEN ORT,

"SO VERWANDELN SICH DIE TRUEMMER
WIEDER IN EIN HELLES SCHLOSZ,
UND ES TANZEN WIEDER LUSTIG
RITTER, FRAUN UND KNAPPENTROSZ;

"UND WER JENES WORT GESPROCHEN,
DEM GEHOEREN SCHLOSZ UND LEUT',
PAUKEN UND TROMPETEN HULD'GEN
SEINER JUNGEN HERRLICHKEIT."

—HEINRICH HEINE

PART I. THE QUEST

This is the poet's theme, this is the sum and substance of his story: that nothing born in the world is evil of itself, that good and evil are both conceived in the mind of man, that man fashions his own world for good or ill, that the good persists, and that evil which is an abortion of good must fail in the end.

* * * * *

There is a smallish bird whom the people of Penn's Woods call in their familiar speech "Zahschlipperle," which being interpreted signifies Little Tooth Insinuator. To others still he is known as Richard Wren. He comes from God knows whence, seeking a nesting place, and reaches an enchanted land on a mid-month April day. Bothered by no inferiority complex and with a flair for the extraordinary, squatter or claim jumper or pioneer, he sets up his stakes hither and yon, fortifying the most desirable sites with breastworks of tree fragments and sundry.

April 15

His mate, Dame Jennie, follows shortly after, as short in temper as she is in person. There is abiding comfort in song—is it any wonder there are poets? Is it any wonder that cock-wren sings? And is it any wonder that his songs are so brief?

April 25

PART ONE

THE QUEST

I.

Once on a time, and it was long ago—
  Ah, happy time! ah, far romantic time!—
When bird and beast taught man all he did know;
  When being weeds for flowers was no crime;
When wizards up and down made magic show,
  And master minstrels sang high deeds in rhyme;
When little folk tripped nightly on the green
With twinkling feet for Fairy Mab their queen;

II.

When warlocks took the shape of butterflies
  And sipped the cotter's milk set out to curd;
When mountain dwarfs were echoes; when the skies
  At sunset marked the flight of Phoenix bird;
When knight and lindworm battled for fair prize;
  When dryads dreamed by hard druidic word
Forever in the hearts of birchen trees,
And mermaids quit for love the restless seas;

III.

When booming she-dragon hid her timorous brood
  In dim primordial cave from griffon sight;
When goblins roamed the sylvan solitude,
  Making the hellish darkness darker night;
When hex cavorted in the interlude,
  And ennui was unknown to mortal wight—
In such a time remote and such a day
A giant there lived of whom old legends say:

IV.

He dwelt within a vale where echo spoke
  With twice seven mouths, alone, apart from man.
His hold outtopped a century-aged oak
  And covered ground as much its shadows span
From morn till eve. There whiles he slept and woke,
  And from his doorway watched how sunbeams ran;
And as he drowsed he dropt his nether jowl:
Gobemouche his name, the son of Ufspahrmaul.

V.

He did not know, yet happier years before
  This bulky carl was but a willowy lad.
His graces once were in the large no more:
  His amiable faults had grown up somehow bad,
A witch's spell to blame. He one time wore
  Too livery of a princess—now turned sad
Though sovereign queen of feather, fur and fin
Through all the enchanted realms of Might-ha'-been.

VI.

It chanced an April shower as he slept,
  His suspiration making windy drouth
Upon his beard whose bristles swayed and leapt
  Like branches blown, new-mated from the South
Two wrens winged by; and Jennie, heart-adept
  In ways past finding out, popped in his mouth,
While on the squally under-lip all noon
Her cock-bird clung to lilt his merry tune.

VII.

He struck up once, and twice, and once again;
  Anon peeped slyly after his lost spouse;
The lusty roundel wrought sunshine in rain,
  But might not in the very least arouse
His wifling—throat swelled rapturous all in vain.
  Still, still she kept her, stiller than a louse:
Then slipped out from a molar cavity
Large as the circ of Hera's oxen eye.

VIII.

And deep it was as all the rosy reach
  Of Aphrodite's index finger, or
Deft bill of hummingbird that each by each
  Searches fresh flower-wells for honey store.
She straight swept out assorted twigs of beech,
  While from a stout chin whisker cock-wren swore:
He'd lured her to the spot, letting his mate
Think she had found it—O the reprobate!

IX.

When Dick sped to his summer stamping ground
  Full ten suns leading Jennie, where the towers
Of festive palace once had danced he found
  A crumbling donjon sheltered but from showers
No more than dismal den. There Morpheus-bound
  The giant sprawled, and Dicky, by the powers,
Tugged many a sprig into the hollow tooth,
Torn bonnet, ears and sporran of the youth.

X.

The flicker would build in the giant's boot;
  The bluebird thought to nest too in his sleeve;
The starling had in view following suit;
  And sparrows flocked thick as beetles at eve:
'Long came cock-wren, he didn't give a hoot
  For all their fine intentions, but by leave
Or let of none he claimed all for his own.
Sir Richard had a way—not his alone.

XI.

For Jennie paused to chide him, bristling brown:
  "Thou lazy varlet, wilt leave me all to fix?"
He brought her sticks—whenas she wanted down;
  He brought her down—when she'd have barrier sticks.
Tingled his ear with "Oaf!" and "Clod!" and "Clown!"
  Till, noseward 'scaped, he quit both toil and tricks:
The louder rang the giant's sonorous snore,
Was Dicky fain to trill it more and more.

PART II. THE NEST

May 2

In six days God made heaven and earth and on the seventh day he rested. It takes Mistress Jennie Wren the full seven days to complete her domestic arrangements in the hollow tooth of the giant Gobemouche, and she gives her spouse no rest any day of the seven.

PART TWO

THE NEST

I.

Now on Gobemouche's brow like as a scowl
  He hung or wreathed his lip like thoughts made
    sweet
In dreams, the noons were seven fair and foul;
  The hollow tooth-hid nest was all complete;
When, cracking jaws, the son of Ufspahrmaul
  Yawned mightily, and staggered to his feet:
Dick like a flash dove in that selfsame nest.
The bottom was a cozy thing to breast

II.

Gobemouche addressed his shadow, matin tall,
  "I go a-fishing," flexing arms he said.
He took his rods and reels down from the wall,
  Net, gaff and lures, and turned a shaggy head
To where the upland freshets tinkling fall,
  Or sun their silvery riffles on broad bed.
There he trolled baited lines, and by a pool
He cast out flies while yet the morn was cool.

III.

A lady came upon him unaware,
  Winning his ear with her so gentle speech;
But as he gazed and listened, her elfin hair
  Grew tangled, and the bloom as on a peach
Dropt from her, leaving dream-deep lines of care,
  While with her anguished eyes she did beseech
And with her voice to Gobemouche like the whine
Of penitent winds intoning through a pine.

IV.

"O spare my pretty fish!" with piteous sigh
  She craved, and eloquent fingers' mute appeal;
"O spare the flashing fins of my small fry,
  My dace and perch and trout that gladly feel
The water's limpid touch soft-pulsing by;
  Minnow and prickly stone cat, polished eel
And golden carp: down stream let thy lines strike
In deeps below black bass and greedy pike."

V.

Her wild concern and utter helplessness
  Choked him with rage. Her words they tasted tart.
He could not crush a woman in distress,
  But sure a murderous thought did swiftly dart
One moment through his brain then none the less,
  And detestation bit deep in his heart.
Fierce hate stung at his heart as she wept there
Who first had seemed to him so very fair.

VI.

So fast to beat one heart though not forbore
  Gobemouche felt in his hollow tooth an ache,
That might have been old conscience racking sore
  If he's a bird brown as the Shrovetide cake
Wherewith ere Lenten rite richly the hoar
  Sinner will fortify himself for his belly's sake;
And brown wings fluttered 'gainst their ivory cell,
For Dick had heard a voice he knew full well.

VII.

Gobemouche salved tooth and conscience with balm
      of fllight:
  He gathered up his tackle; tributary
And branch were crossed till ten times sifted light
  But glimmered to reflect pale realms of Faery,
Where it behooves the boldest mortal wight
  To cross his breast, to step close and be wary.
There in the dim, dark wood he laid his lines
With heedful watch for mystic spells and signs.

VIII.

He whipt the stream through many a shaded vale
  And for a lordly catch, ere even's still
Slipped on him caught deep in the galingale,
  Sedge, reeds, and osiers. Toward a beetling hill
He towered slow, and mid the spent light's trail
  Spied out a glade and cot with cressy sill.
Across his path, hissing from right to left,
A serpent slithered into a slimy cleft.

IX.

Gobemouche surmised a protent 'twas of harm,
  So wrapped his mantle closer; when a groan
Unhatched his soul to panicky alarm.
  He saw a lanthorn's flare against a stone.
A leering hag held out a shriveled arm;
  At first he thought it was a dead man's bone;
Her crack-lipped voice struck Gobemouche with a swish:
"I fast! I famish! Give me of your fish!"

X.

Yet as he gazed she seemed a winsome lass.
  He smiled back blandly her bewitching smile,
And threw upon her lap a brace of bass.
  "Grow where thou loomest, fool, a mickle while!"
She screamed; and in that hollow, haunted pass,
  Deep in the gloomy wood many a mile on mile,
Dumbly he stared, and wonderstruck he stood,
His massive limbs turned all to chestnut wood.

XI.

"Thou'lt give me of my fish, wilt, Hang-the-jowl?
  My fish that played up to my very door!
I tell thee, boorish son of Ufspahrmaul,
  The flood shall sweep thy broken boughs before,
The wind shall comb thy beard, clouds be thy cowl,
  But thou shalt never go a-fishing more!"
Three times she shrieked: the chestnut shuddered amain
As riven with a bolt, and thrice she shrieked again.

PART III. FIRST EGG

An interval of five days follows completion of the wren's nest. The number of the possessive, it will be noted, is singular, and the gender is feminine. So is Mistress Jennie, both singular and feminine. It is Dame Jennie Wren's nest which has been completed; and on the fifth day after that achievement a miracle
May 7 *occurs. At least, she would have her lord but not her master so believe when he finds a fragile speckled object in the bottom of the nest.*

PART THREE

FIRST EGG

I.

The smile froze on his face and gaped aboon
  In concave orifice within the bole
To nest the solemn owl or house raccoon.
  A ponderous sigh, as 'twere a living soul,
From drooping branches heaved. The sudden moon
  With mellow splendor burst through night's black stole
And dript from panting leaves on filmy-eyed
Flaked fungus and scaled lichen down his side.

II.

The lanthorn bobbed like will-o'-wisp among
  Betangled rushes 'cross the deep morass;
All night plashed shiny tails, till Morn upflung
  His star to lap bead drops from off the grass:
Who but cock-wren from knothole hopped and sung
  In that wild waste and strange he sung, alas!
Once, twice, his tune under a leafy cover;
He sang it thrice, and three times sang it over.

III.

I wonder what it was made cock-wren sing?
  O in his nest, secure at dizzy top,
His eye had seen a wondrous glistening thing!
  That's why he sang as he would never stop.
Like arrow from the bow he took to wing,
  And like a soft brown blossom did he drop
Beside the sad sweet lady of the rill,
And woke her from foregazing with his trill.

IV.

And she was sweeter than the sweetest theme
  Wee wren ever lisped into the listening ear,
And she was brighter than the dawn's bright gleam,
  And she was purer than the purest tear,
And she was fairer than love's fairest dream,
  And then the dearest love she was more dear,
Lovelier was she than the loveliest rose—
Ah, she was sweeter, dearer, lovelier than those!

V.

"Whence comest thou, bonny bird, singing so merrily?"
  "From my nest in the dark wood, lady, I fly."
"Whither goest thou, bonny bird, singing so cheerily?'
  "I go to seek my lady—ask me not why."
"What wouldst thou, bonny bird, tell it me verily?"
  "Would thou knewest, lady, and thy help were nigh!
Alone canst save the son of Ufspahrmaul,
For he is fallen on ways are dark and foul."

VI.

And hearing out his tale, the lady knew
That witch for Dame Katrina. "You must get
Suchwise," she urged, "her potent amulet
In toadskin cased with diabolic brew,
And she will straight restore Gobemouche." Off flew
Cock-wren back to his nest while morning's wet
Still pearled the under leaf, and 'gainst the noon
Perched in his chestnut bower he sang his tune.

VII.

At midday in her door the hex slept sound.
Cock-wren snatched toadskin, suchwise got, to dark
Recess in the trunk's womb. As from a swound
She moaned awake, she knew, she went mad stark,
She foamed at mouth, she writhed upon the ground.
Something sank angry like a fiery spark
Hissing beside her. Blear-eyed as a bat
Katrina blinked on it, and cursed and spat.

VIII.

"Avaunt, avaunt, spiteful fowl, shrilling so flauntingly!"
"I'll leave when I'm ready, beldame, will I."
"The devil take thee, noisy wretch, teasing so tauntingly!"
"He'll never take me, hex, an thou art by."
"What doest here, hellbrand, in broad daylight hauntingly?"
"I'll do that shall make thee quake where thou dost lie.
For thou'lt never more have amulet till free
Gobemouche goes in the flesh I warrant thee."

IX.

Katrina gasped, and backward told her spell:
  The chestnut's branches swayed, and swam to brawn,
To blood and bone of mortal man. Nigh fell
  Her toadskin which the hex clutched, and was gone,
The fetid weir and fen, ere I can tell,
  As at third crow of cock the leprechaune.
Gobemouche gathered up his lines, and with his fish
Waded to where a damsel had her wish.

X.

She leaned upon the bank by pebbly brook,
  So desolate, forlorne, and so downcast,
He felt a pang and gave her spoil of his hook,
  Which her fresh hands prepared, and to break fast
She did invite him: they in that pleasant nook
  Together ate their savory repast.
Gobemouch left with a sigh. Her floating hair
Possessed him long, for sure the maid was fair.

PART IV. THE CLUTCH

Miracle treads hard on the heels of miracle in quick and regular succession until Richard comes to accept them as part of his daily routine. By the time the sixth speckled foreign object has appeared in the nest he begins to harbor the not ill-founded suspicion that Jennie may be at the bottom of it all. On the seventh day Jennie rests.

May 14

PART FOUR

THE CLUTCH

I.

Flush as the rose scarce broken from its stalk
  A morrow fell. "I go a-fowling," said
Gobemouche, let out from wicker cage his hawk,
  And took his bow down from its dusty bed.
Then forth upon the merry forest-walk
  His footsteps brushed the leaves with rustling
    tread.
Letting an arrow flip at a bright wing
He missed. O well, it was a pretty thing.

II.

He loosed next shaft more true. A feather
  Spun gaily earthward from a flicker's breast:
A youth had worn it in his cap of leather.
  Gobemouche lay his third dart against the rest.
Lightfooted stepped a childe fair as the weather,
  And in melodious strain she thus addressed
Him: "Spare my own, my dearest darling birds!"
And hate within his heart swelled at her words.

III.

"O spare my sparrows and my smooth brown dove,
  My piping cardinal and whistling plover,
My robin for his anthem, my thrush above
  The world's rude cares so blithely that doth hover,
Lark, phoebe, redwing, wantons all I love,
  Hedge bluebird and the bobwhite in the clover—
Sir, spare their tuneful throats, and onward go
Where falcon rattle clacks and caw of crow."

IV.

"I most entreat", she wept, "thou wilt not harm
  My wren, held in particular regard:
Wren's nest in tooth is better than a charm,
  And harboring one will bring its own reward."
Trembling with inward rage Gobemouche waxed warm.
  He gripped his bow and shafts of hickory hard.
He ground his teeth, and bit his white lips blue,
While two wrens laughed, "At least he'll not harm two."

V.

The giant ran on. The big oaks, too, would run.
  He sped so fast their branches from him bent.
He laid low swan and heron in the sun;
  And turkey, grouse and river fowl that went
Whirring before his bolt—day not yet done—
  Made bag to bulge: his arrows all were spent
A scavenger swung silent overhead,
With baleful nostrils smelling out the dead.

VI.

Gobemouche winced sore. The buzzard boded ill.
  He quickened his doubtful steps ere ambushed night
Should tumble down day's battlements and will
  Succumb to leadfoot sleep as well it might:
So happed upon a hovel with mossy sill,
  Waking an owl's hoot, while he saw a light,
Greenish and weird, and heard tones like the boom
Of ominous bull-bat coasting in the gloom.

VII.

"This seven day, master, scarce a bite I've had
  Save stinking fish, so bless thy comely face,"
A crone said leering that Gobemouche grew glad,
  And of his birds he threw her down a brace.
"I know a lass would thank ye for 'em, lad—
  Tonight thou'lt sup where devil shall say grace.
Thou lubbard loon thou, wither in thy tracks!"
Her yell smites on his ear, and his ear cracks.

VIII.

Cold stone Gobemouche lay, son of Ufspahrmaul.
  The hex raved at his foot: "My bubblyjocks,
My ducks and geese wilt give? Let the storms howl
  I' thy granite ears and tear thy brambly locks;
Let condor breed and sovereign eagle scowl,
  And raven gather there his swarthy flocks:
Thy fowling days are out, and dove may rest
Nathless on hawk and flinted arbalest."

IX.

Fronting the hermitage of that fell hag,
  Numb, petrified, sheer cliff-steep he did tower,
A fissure-faced and cavernous-boweled crag,
  Where sumach grows in summer sun and shower,
And wintry desolation long might lag
  Before first leaf uncurl or earliest flower
Burst. Under leprous moon 'cross gleaming rocks
Whip-poor-will wailed and parrot hills made mocks.

X.

All night beneath the stars the ledge lay cold
  In marble immobility. The morn
Kissed the grey top back to its wonted gold,
  And warmed the creeper, trailing vine and thorn.
I' the prime ray splashed a tiny creature, bold
  And brown forsooth, from out a crevice born:
Cock-wren sang bubbling over to all the world.
He sang his six smooth eggs in their nest dew-pearled.

PART V. THE HATCH

May Fourteenth and the hatch is begun. Cock-wren has become a solitary bird. For hours he sways upon a straggly lock of the giant's tousled head and sings by force of habit who once sang to drown his wifeling's voice. He is puzzled and mystified by that personage's unwonted silence, and yet he keeps a wary
May *eye upon his spouse as she remains hidden, with but*
28 *a few limited excursions, a fortnight long in the nest of hair and feathers and down.*

PART FIVE

THE HATCH

I.

Why shouldn't cock-wren sing? Did he despair?
  His high heart wot deliverance was not far.
Unto a copse his pinions cleft the air,
  Unto his lady, liefer than ringdoves are.
Fairer was she than bright lily is fair;
  Her mouth rose petals, and each eye a star.
He sang to her, he sang her all demure,
He sang her purer than the pearl is pure.

II.

"Whence comest thou, bonny bird, singing so
    merrily?"
  "From my nest in the cold stone, lady, I fly."
"Whither goest thou, bonny bird, singing so
    cheerily?"
  "I go to seek my lady—ask me not why."
"What wouldst thou, bonny bird, tell it me verily?"
  "Would thou knewest, lady, and thy help were nigh!
Alone canst save the son of Ufspahrmaul,
For he is fallen on ways are dark and foul."

III.

Attent to his sad rune, "Thus thou must do,"
  The lady said. "A forked and mystic wand
From hazel clipped 'twixt the old moon and new
  Is ever fumbled in Katrina's hand.
Purloin this talisman, and she will sue
  For its return at any cost. Command
The fowler to be freed, anon she'll free
Him from his state of gealed frigidity."

IV.

So cock-wren did when Hecate drowsed betimes.
  She tumbled out her trance as she were limp
From a long broomstick ride to torrid climes.
  She clinched sharp talons till her flesh grew crimp,
And clucked aghast like poet for lost rhymes:
  "Hast stolen my hazel stick from me, harsh imp?
Where hast my stick, where hast my hazel stick?"
" 'Twill exorcise my nest," mewed hissing Dick.

V.

O Richard Wren was in a lovely rage!
  His wrath was mightier than scorned woman's hate
And deeper than the secrets of a mage.
  His armor bristled with its spotty plate.
His breast within was bitterer than sage.
  Through the bruised air fluffed form did fulminate,
And like a turkey-tom with angry sound
He dropped his wings and tumty-tummed the ground.

VI.

"Avaunt, avaunt, spiteful fowl, shrilling so flauntingly!"
  "I'll leave when I'm ready, beldame, will I."
"The devil take thee, noisy wretch, teasing so tauntingly!"
  "He'll never take me, hex, an thou art by."
"What doest here, hellbrand, in broad daylight hauntingly?"
  "I'll do that shall make thee screech where thou dost lie;
For never shalt hold thy stick of hazel wood,
Till forth Gobemouch stands in his flesh and blood."

VII.

Backward by rote Katrine crooned her hard spell:
  The slivery pile did inward crunch and grate,
And by a sleight to hex inexorable
  The brittle textures of that massy weight,
No fragment lost, together flowed pellmell
  In pliant sinews all inviolate.
Gobemouche pushed on apace with bow and bag,
And over her hazel stick he left the hag.

VIII.

He strode through boskage as the pigeon flies
  To tranquil frith where in deep elm tree shade
Upon the moss one mused with twilight eyes;
  And at her feet jaeger and bag were laid.
He built a fire there between his sighs,
  For faint was he, and more than fair the maid.
She spread the roasted fowl on birch-bark plate;
With zest of youth and hunger's sauce they ate.

IX.

Sleep loosed the fowler's lids in that soft lair
  And let droop down his lip. With even's hush
Forth whisked cock-wren and spilled a debonair
  And thrice-repeated ditty 'fore the thrush
Could sing one low prelude, driving dull care
  To his den and in milady's cheek a blush.
Gobemouche woke with the stars and looked for one:
The wren slept in his nest, but she was gone.

PART VI. FLEDGLINGS

The awakening comes. While Sir Richard was singing to the wide world, Jennie had been bringing more miracles to pass in that downy cup behind the bristling barrier of fagots; and suddenly six querulous voices are lifted and six eloquent beaks appear with bills spread wide apart and uvulas pink and titillating. Paterfamilias discovers to his sorrow, and at the urgent invitation of Dame Jennie, that his is not the only stomach that has to be filled. Many a fat spider, many a juicy larva, many a crisp beetle that might otherwise have delighted his own palate goes to appease and quiet the gargantuan appetities of that miraculous progeny. Some cock-wrens of moderu times have been accused of consorting with more than one mate and even of slaying their young, but Sir Richard, be it understood, is neither bigamist nor infanticide. He belongs to the age of chivalry and is the soul of honor. The poet will vouch for him though he will not say as much for any other wren, male or female, or for any man or woman whatsoever.

June 25

PART SIX

FLEDGLINGS

I.

Gobemouche twanged bowstring till it did rebound,
  "I go a-hunting," said a morrow morn,
Unleashed from kennel his lowbaying hound,
  And mouthed his iron-throated bugle horn,
Seven times making seven echoes sound
  Ullulations flung on ears of unicorn:
Then hastened up a hill before the light
Of a new day on boar spear glistered bright.

II.

There on the crest he stalked a mild milch doe.
  Wide-eyed and unafraid she faced her fate,
  The couched and whimpering hound, the man elate,
Eye slanting down the bolt upon his bow;
  When stole between them like the wraith of hate
A phantom figure whom he wont to know.
He splintered the shaft of aspen in his fist,
And curst through his clenched teeth all that he wist.

III.

"Ah, spare my dappled does that haunt the vale,
  Sleek fawn and playful cub," the lady plead,
With tristful visage. "Of the silver tail
  My gray squirrel often from my hand has fed,
And blab-eared hare the beagle's keen to trail—
  Spare all my tender innocents," she said.
"In alpine fastness let thy prowess count
On wolf and wily fox and catamount."

IV.

She spake no more; Gobemouche spake even less:
  Unuttered fury does the longer burn,
But fire without air fumes out, I guess.
  So scaling headlong pass and mountain turn,
He clomb high in that untracked wilderness
  And beat the covert of thick brake and fern,
Where rousing antlered stag and speeding hart,
Tough-shouldered he outsped them with his dart.

V.

He hunted down the shag and grizzled bear
  And carnal lion gorging itself on ox;
He slew the sharp-tusked boar, and to his snare
  Drove in the pard, and did outwit the fox.
Come night the goat had left its lofty stair,
  And packing werewolves howled among the rocks.
Across his path sinister from the right
Lean rabbit limped, and it was spectral white.

VI.

Fearsome upon a hutch with slatey sill
  Gobemouche in a scant clearing pitched by then.
A wife crouched nigh his ear and whined intil,
  "This long moon, huntsman, but two skimp turkey-hen
Ha' passed these lips. Heaven shrive thee for thy kill!
  I beg ye for a bit of venison."
Dogwise she fawned, and her mesmeric eyes
Green-sparkled in the dark like fireflies.

VII.

He warmed unto her look, and from his spoil
  He chose the haunch of a stout buck and cast
It in her cauldron that did bubbling boil.
  "Of many hunting days this is thy last,"
She clattered like a rattler in the coil;
  "My swine shall munch in peace their acorn mast.
Thou'lt stalk the deer and tussle with the boar
And halloa down my wooded hills no more."

VIII.

Thereat, in faith, even with the hex's croak
  Gobemouche dissolved as vapor from the pot
Into voluminous veil of pungent smoke
  Like that which up the ingle chimlay shot
High as the point of the attollent oak,
  And spidered 'cross the sky with inky blot.
Gobemouche rose so; and as he flung about,
Thrice two brown birds bewildered fluttered out.

PART VII. FIRST FLIGHT

Two months to a day after his mate had joined him and started to build her nest cock-wren finds half -a-dozen other Jennie Wrens in the air around him. At least, he swears they have all inherited Jennie's temper and cantankerousness and nothing of their sire's heroic mould. Some of the offspring are balanced precariously on bush or tree and some are fluttering on the ground. The orderliness of the nest is succeeded by a period of wild confusion. One here, another there, and all demanding attention. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

June 26

PART SEVEN

FIRST FLIGHT

I.

All night the cloud hung monstrous and deform
  Overcasting like a pall the heaven's vault;
And when the torrents gushed, the drops were warm,
  On leaf and stone and flower they were salt;
But that the thunders halloaed in the storm
  And lightnings twitched was not the witch's fault.
About her roof black tempests bellowed sair:
The groveling sorceress rasped her lips in prayer.

II.

With pallid day cock-wren swift-hurtling went
  To a blest hill where his dear drooped alone.
The haze above her made a filmy tent;
  And over her the wren sobbed lutestring tone
Until that mighty heart of cloud was rent
  And on her hair a golden splendor shone.
Brighter she was than through smoke rift the sun,
Than moon and stars, brighter than everyone.

III.

"Whence comest thou, bonny bird, singing so merrily?"
"From my nest in the dun cloud, lady, I fly."
"Whither goest thou, bonny bird, singing so cheerily?"
"I go to seek my lady—ask me not why."
"What wouldst thou, bonny bird, tell it me verily?"
Would thou knewest, lady, and thy help were nigh!
Alone canst save the son of Ufspahrmaul,
For he is fallen on ways are dark and foul."

IV.

And hearing out his tale, "Thus thou must do,"
Milady said. "A fatal fillet ring
With cabalistic signs wrought through and through
Circles the witch's wrist. Get this and wing
To peak-hung cloud; then at Katrina mew
Till she to man inform the wandering
Mists. When he's tall as sapling to whose top
I scant may reach a-tiptoe, bid her stop."

V.

So from Katrina sleeping cock-wren took
The fatal fillet ring. She dreamt it lost,
And out her dream into an ague shook
Like sere leaves taken with the pinching frost.
She glimpsed thrice two live sparks about her spook
As they from Pluto's Stygian forge were tossed;
Did sputter, caterwaul, and hiss, I ween,
And pester like six passions pale Katrine.

VI.

"Avaunt, avaunt, spiteful fowls, shrilling so flauntingly!"
"We'll leave when we're ready, beldame," they cry.
"The devil take ye, noisy brats, teasing so tauntingly!"
"He'll never take us, hag, an thou art by."
"What would ye here, hellbrands, i' broad daylight hauntingly?"
"We would Gobemouche again: but thou shalt die.
Thy time is come, and mayst thou expiate
Henceforth with good thy masquerade of hate!"

VII.

Katrine powwowed, convulse from knee to nape,
Till a phantasmagoric fog gan fall,
Incarnadine as is the ripe wine grape,
As cedar high, as spruce, as sapling small:
Cock-wren cried, "Hold!" and fast in human shape
Gobemouche stood lithe and as a sapling tall.
His locks spread silken soft. His nether lip
Did ruddily like loosened bowstring dip.

VIII.

"Where hast my ring, where hast my fillet ring?"
Katrina in her pain moaned piteously;
And setting on his dart the hellish thing,
"Here hast!" Gobemouche said straining, and let fly.
Unto its mark she heard the missile sing.
Her time was come, and yet she did not die—
She died to live that living had been dead
In her despite: the arrow was well sped.

PART VIII. FIRST SONG

A few Richard Juniors turn up in the lot, it eventually develops, to whom the gift of song is given. But long before they find their mission in life Richard is in the throes of a second courtship; and he has two families successfully reared to look back upon when in the golden days of October, after the moult and before the coming of boreas, he quits the land of Might-ha'-been with Jennie and all their brood for a balmier climate God knows where.

October 15

* * * * *

As both song and oath emanate from the one throat of Richard Wren, so good and evil may issue from the same source, evil being a perversion of good. It is easier to overcome evil by forgetting evil and supplanting evil with good than by magnifying and prosecuting evil and letting the good go by.

All ends well that is well. The poet has willed that his story so end. The end cannot but be good if we will it so.

PART EIGHT

FIRST SONG

I.

Smiling a new-born infant's smile, she told
  Him marveling at her change how she had nursed
A lovely princess once who made so bold
  As to uncage her mock-bird, how she curst
The lady and her land and self with old
  Hard spells Merlin had taught her—now reversed
By the so brave Gobemouche. He blushed, and heard
Somewhere i' the bush the twitter of a bird.

II.

Katrine revealed but part of what she knew.
  She did not say how in the happier days
She looked with favour on the henchman too
  Could make a princess at his reverent gaze
Lower the curtains of her eyes of blue
  And flood her cheeks with crimson of amaze.
(Katrine went white, a brown-eyed pick-a-pie
Whose color ran away and told a lie.)

III.

She led him laboring down by slow descents,
  Beneath one stag of nine, where he might see
A palace soar on wooded eminence—
  O that a sight so glorious could be!
The low sun flashed from towers and battlements,
  Blasting their souls with utter ecstasy.
Now moat stayed them, till porter dropped the gate,
And bade the travelers enter: it was late.

IV.

There nigh the casement bower sly cock-wren
  Sang from his argent house ere candle-light
Thrice-welcome to Gobemouche the best of men;
  And met him too his lady, fair and bright,
His lady of the wood, the Princess Imogen:
  O there was feasting far into the night!
And the girl forgave Katrina ere she slept,
And long in one another's arms they wept.

V.

The morrow morn gay lord and lady went
  Angling with Imogen to willow shade.
Some frolicked on the banks; some luting sent
  Canoes among the lilies; some did wade;
The youths to keen endurance further bent:
  Gobemouche outswam the best. Lines were none laid.
Empty the creel. Gramercy but what prize
Gobemouche took home—blessed memory of two eyes!

VI.

The second morn a-fowling to the wood
  The Princess passed with her rich retinue:
Some harked birdsong; some fixed flowers in snood;
  And some walked on the mosses two by two.
Gobemouche ran swifter than all others could,
  And outdid all with his good bow of yew—
Yet brought home naught, an if he brought this much,
A-fowling gone, but memory of a touch.

VII.

And the third morn in scintillant array
  A-hunting with her court to mountain wall
The Princess rode upon her palfrey Gray.
  Above the silver lake and crashing waterfall,
They wound their silver horns above the brae;
  And high one huntsman clomb above them all:
A-hunting had he gone, and O what bliss
He brought him home—the memory of a kiss!

VIII.

The plight was given and the day was set.
  The sun shone on their wedding-day, I trow,
Albe with dews of joy its eyne were wet;
  And on their casement ledge the rose aglow
Gave lovers' greeting, and from parapet
  Of his own argent citadel below
(Spring after spring returning with the sun)
Cock-wren sang endless prothalamion.

ENVOY

And Nourice Katrina held upon her kneen
Many a bonny prince and many a budding queen
And told o' her witching days i' the leafy green.
Long lived Gobemouche, and long lived Imogen:
Wise, happy, just, and peaceful was their reign
Over that fair land and far of Might-ha'-been;
  And all that breathed on earth, in flood or air,
  In its own place found sanctuary there.

DAPHNE

O ladies, when fair Daphne fled
  And the sun god pursued her,
The foolish maid wished she were dead
  For that Apollo wooed her.
Were maidens all like Daphne was,
  What laurel wildernesses!
What poets were! One poet does
  Not hazard random guesses.

Apollo was the sun, they say,
  While Daphne was the dew,
And like the mist she ran away
  When Phoebus flashed in view.
Her sire was a river troll,
  But if the Archer knew,
He cared no whit, for bless your soul,
  She ran, and he ran too.

The hills and dales of Thessaly
  Though for all time enduring

Never again such chase shall see
  Nor damsel so alluring.
She heeded not his fervent plea;
  She recked not his adjuring;
But faster ran the faster he,
  Bent hotfoot on securing.

Once Daphne fled so and the god
  Of poets once pursued her,
And pansies sprang up where he trod,
  And myrtles where he wooed her.
Daphne fled lightly over the sod,
  Afar Apollo viewed her;
As though his heart would break the god
  Sighed after (and pursued her):

"At first I deemed you merely fair
  And good to look upon;
But when I looked and saw you there,
The sunlight on your face and hair
  And in your heart the sun,
  All, all my peace was gone.

"Who tortures me wherever I go,
  And who has made me sigh?

Forgive you I will never—no,
  Forget you never try:
I'll hate you and I'll love you so,
  Tormentor, till you die!

"I hate your cheeks of that same hue
  The roses hold in trust;
I hate your eyes of darling blue,
  O heavenly-moulded dust;
I hate you most for loving you—
  May my revenge be just!

"I mean to crush you, slim and slender,
  Rare, roguish roseleaf fay,
To rifle sweets of breath as tender
  As newborn breath of day,
And your lips, O dear offender,
  I'll kiss them quite away.

"By all the fond Fates that await you,
  By Aphrodite's dove,
By all the Graces you are mate to,
  I swear it, and by Jove:
If this be hating, how I hate you!
  If loving, how I love!"

Still Daphne fled, Apollo still
  Crept nigher, nigher, nigher;
Love's lightnings through his breast did thrill
  To have his heart's desire.
She looked, she leaped as leaps a rill
  Panting o'er rocks of fire,
And cried to heaven—the firm will
  Of heaven was the higher.

So Daphne grew leafy and tall,
  A laurel — earth upbore it,
And all in vain the god did call,
  And all in vain he tore it;
The poet god's ambrosial
  Wreathed brow forever wore it.

Ah, why should we strive to obtain
  If in the end we miss them,
If girl to tree and cloud to rain
  Dissolve before we kiss them?
Lies heaven only in pursuit?
  The devil take such moral:
If poets cannot reach the fruit,
  Why, then, they'll grasp the laurel.

ACTAEON

The goddess of the silver bow,
  Out of the midnight sky,
She and her maidens throw
  Their glittering raiment by.
Round throat and curving breast
  Plash in the shattered lake:
What dreams disturb your rest?
  Wake, Actaeon, awake.

Seeker after lovely things,
  Heart profoundly pained
By memories of wings
  Beauty's self has stained,
Come to your doom shall be;
  Feed, soul, last time in bliss:
No man unscathed may see
  Vision like to this.

Too soon adown the crag
  And deep under leafy limb,
The hunter is the stag,
  His whole pack coursing him;
And all his dead loves rise,
  And his old yearnings rend,
Till the whelps have claimed their prize
  And Youth is at an end.

To men with years grown gray
  Who've lived a long youth through
Death's not a tragedy—
  It is living anew;
But in the green of spring,
  When Youth is at flood tide,
Death is a ghastly thing
  To die as Actaeon died.

Diana was the moon,
  Her maidens were the stars,
Who swim the dark lagoon,
  Who tread earth's sandy bars;
When night is at the noon,
  Who joy to dip and run:
Diana was the moon,
  But who was Actaeon?

Perhaps he was a cloud
  Who trailed in Luna's wake
And glimpsed the shining proud
  Goddess beside the lake?
He was Zephyr perhaps
  Whose fingers stirred the pool,
And the ripples were all handclaps,
  And the touches, tender and cool?

Or was he Will-o'-the-Wisp
  Lured out of the misty marsh
By starry laughter's crisp
  Spell to a doom most harsh?
Breeze brushing tree and grass,
  Cloud tasting sea and sun,
Or light to gleam and pass—
  Which could be Actaeon?

No, he was none of these,
  But Youth longing ardently,
Impetuous as you please
  To taste, to touch, to see.
I, too, would turn to gaze
  Were Artemis in the lake,
Though I did end my days
  For that one glimpse's sake.

FOOT-PATH WAY

JOG ON, JOG ON THE FOOT-PATH WAY,
AND MERRILY HENT THE STILE-A:
A MERRY HEART GOES ALL THE DAY,
YOUR SAD TIRES IN A MILE-A.

—SHAKESPEARE.

ONE ON ANOTHER AGAINST THE WALL
PILE UP THE BOOKS—I AM DONE WITH THEM ALL.
I SHALL BE WISE, IF I EVER AM WISE,
OUT OF MY OWN EARS, AND OF MY OWN EYES.

—ALICE CARY.

I HAVE LEARNED
TO LOOK ON NATURE, NOT AS IN THE HOUR
OF THOUGHTLESS YOUTH; BUT HEARING OFTENTIMES
THE STILL, SAD MUSIC OF HUMANITY.

—WORDSWORTH

THE FOOT-PATH WAY

The foot-path way is good to tread:
Whose heart is warm and blood is red
  Will feel his pulses keener beat
  When greensward yields unto his feet
And God's blue sky bends overhead.

His dancing steps are onward sped
Where robin pipes to wake the dead;
  The violet's perfume helps make sweet
    The foot-path way.

And bramble bush and mossy bed,
And glade and glen how soon are fled!
  The sudden turn's surprise to greet
  Of vistas dim and incomplete
Will urge us on like men star-led
    The foot-path way.

ICH GING IM WALDE

(From the German of Goethe)

I strode through the woodland
  After my nose:
Seeking for nothing
  At all, I suppose.

I saw in the shadows
  A blossom nigh,
Bright as the starlight,
  Fair as the eye.

I was for plucking;
  Posy spake low,
"Sure, to let wither,
  You'd not break me so?"

Then I uprooted
  The plant from the loam,
And carried it with me
  Triumphantly home.

The flower in quiet
  Garden was set:
There it is growing,
  Blossoming yet.

—

And now if you'll pardon,
  Goethe, our mood,
We'll put the posy
  Back in the wood.

MULTUM IN PARVO

Only a cluster of leaves
Green beneath the dust,
The yellow dust on them;
Only a straggling stem
Straggling and trailing as trail it must,
Crowned with a bit of color,
With petals pink as a bride;
Only a wild flower for your feet
Passing to brush aside—
Hither flung by unknown Hand:
Was it Fate or was it Chance?
Who can tell, or who would understand?
Yet all simplicity,
All mystery,
All glory and romance,
All that's common, all that's rare,
All beauty and all wisdom
Succinctly blossom there.

KISMET

What hath the Way in store for you?
A tale o' rose and lore o' rue,
And green and gold and more o' blue.

A questing wing to tease your heart,
A nesting song to ease your heart,
A resting leaf to please your heart.

And much disorder will there be
In the border? Verily,
Yet prettily, yet fairily.

For meekest fern and sleekest feather
Here God hath jumbled all together,
With Maia mirth and Juno weather.

Yea, choose, heart, choose and take your own;
Yea, lose, heart, lose, and make no moan;
If you must break, heart, break alone.

AT THE LOOM

"O, little sister, leave the loom,
Come where the meadows are all abloom;
You may gather as much as hands will hold
And both your arms of marsh marigold;

"You may peer into the tulip's cup
Bee-burdened that swings down and up:
It is weary watching where shuttles shake;
It is other music my catbirds make."

"Ah, little brother, I may not come;
I hear your bees 'mongst the shuttles hum;
Before mine eyes green meadows unfold
With yellow tulip and marsh marigold.

"Brother, I never shall leave the loom
Till I leave 't for the silent tomb:
While mouths are hungry soon and late,
Hungrier eyes and ears must wait."

THE ROSE, THE THISTLE, AND THE STALK OF RYE

A rose, a thistle and a stalk of rye,
They leaned toward me as I wandered by
With mute appeal for immortality.

* * * *

Had I been an ass, after hearing their story,
With one fell gulp I had ended their glory;
But being a poet,
Or something below it,
I moralize
In this wise:

I.

The rose
God knows
Is beautiful to see.

No weed
Can breed
Like thistles, sturdy and free.

Man-high
The rye
Lifts head that man can be.

Bread, beauty and virility—
My deepest salutations to all three.
Man may discriminate but God does not;
For grain or flower or weed, whatever the lot,
They all are equal in the sight
Of God, and God is right.

II.

Spite of its thorn
Man nurses the rose
In garden-close:
New beauties are born
To it, and it shall last
Till man from earth has passed.

Spite of its barb
Man will multiply

The stalks of rye:
Two-fold he will garb
Earth while rye kernels are sweet
And bread is good to eat.

Thanks to its spines
And spite of man the thistle-weed
Will cling by root and spread by seed,
Out of caste and confines,
Trampling the Brahman down, fit
With the joy of life in it.

III.

Some men are good to look upon
And some have done
Good deeds,
But most men are like weeds—
They are not handsome or wise or good
Or noble or of any worth:
God alone knows why they are on earth.
They are like weeds,
But spite of spines they have desire and potency

To be as the rose, to be as the stalks of rye.
And who shall gainsay them?
Not God. Not I.
They have in them eternal stuff,
They have the fierce joy of life in them,
And is not that enough?

FUTILITY

O bother the flowers and bother the birds,
We know them not—they are words, they are words.
For who can feel one flutter of wing?
And who can guess what the sweet throats sing?
And who can tell what flame's i' the flower
To warm our hearts for one little hour?

IN THE AFTER-SUMMER

I.

In the after-summer comes a second spring
When the throaty throstle makes the greenwood ring;
For the heart beats happily with a richer store
Of golden dreams and memories than it held before.

II.

When in mortal season summer's course is run
And to southward slope rose-limits of the sun,
Still the bosom throbs at challenges of the past,
Spates of song overflowing their full brim to the last.

DECEMBER MAGIC

Things happen so we know not how—
Our destinies are working just behind the veil,
Silently preparing while the seasons come and go:
It may be today or it may be tomorrow
Fate thrusts imperative stark finger in our face.

So house leaf-hidden and flaming ochered barn
That sunblind summer called a hard-tramped dusty
mile
Suddenly are dropped behind a shivering fringe of
trees
Upon the neighboring hillock's crusted eminence—
All-stranded, all-apparent in the new-fallen snow.

LEAVES AND MEN.

(A Paraphrase from Homer)

Leaves and men
Are of one race,
One birth,
And one destiny.

Out of earth,
Back to earth—
Man and leaf—
Spans the whole
Calendar
Of their brief
Mortality.

The trees put forth
New crops of leaves
In the springtime.

Winds of winter
Heap the dead leaves
On the ground.

Mankind too
Comes and goes
Generation
After generation.

Is that all?
Who knows.

EVEN SONG

(From the German of Goethe)

Where the lone peaks tower
    There is peace;
Where the treetops lower
    Breezes cease
    From their vain quest;
No bird in the wide wood complains:
Short while remains
    I too will rest.

GARDEN-CLOSE

I KNOW A LITTLE GARDEN-CLOSE
SET THICK WITH LILY AND RED ROSE,
WHERE I WOULD WANDER IF I MIGHT
FROM DEWY DAWN TO DEWY NIGHT,
AND HAVE ONE WITH ME WANDERING.

—WILLIAM MORRIS

A LADY, GRACED WITH SOLITUDE, WHO WENT
SINGING AND SETTING FLOWER BY FLOWER APART,
BY WHICH THE PATH SHE WALKED ON WAS
BESPRENT.

—DANTE (CAYLEY)

PROSERPINE GATHERING FLOWERS,
HERSELF A FAIRER FLOWER, BY GLOOMY DIS
WAS GATHERED.

—MILTON

WO?

Wo ist der Garten,
  Wo ist das Haus,
Praechtig wie diese?
  Such sie mir aus.

Wo duften Rosen
  Frisch mit dem Tau?
Wo solche Veilchen?
  Such mir genau.

Wo pfeifen Voegel
  Suesz im Gesang
Wie Fink und Lerche?
  Suchst aber lang.

Wo flieszt mehr lieblich
  Strom durch das Thal?
Ich ging den Flusz her
  Zehntausend Mal.

Wo blickt die Sonne
  Auf solchem Ort
Mit goldener Wonne
  Immer so fort?

Wo liegt Ruh tiefer
  Im Mondenschein?
Wo ist eine Mutter
  Wie Mutter mein?

VIOLETS FROM AN OLD-FASHIONED GARDEN

I.

Posies well my grandmother knew,
Nurslings that in her garden grew,
  Are you faint for memories
  Of good old hands and burly bees?
  Are you pale for thoughts of these
Time can never restore to you?

II.

Chance when we have gone our way
Will you live another day,
  Languishing sweet-breathed for some
  Of our age while strangers come
  And about you new bees hum?
Deem us quaint and old will they?

SWEET PEA

Diaphanous, luminous, light,
Essence of all that's fair and bright,
On sentient wings breathlessly nigh
To changing to a butterfly,—
There, there you are! I know how trite
My simple halting verses sound
Till you seem to have taken flight,—
You are so far above me quite,—
And left me stumbling on the ground.
The best things, true, have all been said,
And all the laureled bards are dead:
Who's left to sing if 't be not I?
Then what's the use for us to sigh?
Come let's have out our little dream:
I am not always what I seem,
And you—for all I say or do,
Why, always you are always you.

And to what orchid priceless, rare,
From far-off lands shall I compare?
To what that's common everywhere?
O floral mockingbird, you mime
Flower of wayside, meadow, fen,
Deep forest, and the mountain glen;
Flower of every place and clime;
Of every season, shade, and hue—
Yet always you are always you.

April is here: I glimpse again
Apples a-bloom that softly rain
Their silken showers without refrain;
I see the violet's purple cope,
The spring-beauty's roseate flush of hope;
Another glance, and I recall
Midsummer's flaming cardinal;
And in a twinkling it is fall
With aster specks of skyey blue—
Yet always you are always you.

So spite of all your wantonness
And your arch ways I rather guess
As Proteus you would never do—
For always you are always you.
A bit of roguishness peeps out
Ever to clarify our doubt.
No matter: if you'd only know it,
Belike you'd make a glorious poet,
Granting that such distinctions run
'Mongst flowers (I distinguish none);
For by my faith I do declare
No dilettante, debonair
Singer has said on his lute strings
Half of the unutterable things,
Dear flower, you have breathed to me
'Twixt dawn and dusk—well, let that be;
And needs there larger warranty,
Like poet you are full of moods
As number—the Beatitudes!

PARADISUS IN SOLE

Like angels standing in a row,
  With folded wings and golden hair,
The white Madonna lilies glow
  And spread sweet incense on the air.

The clematis that climbs the wall
Makes a blue heaven for them all.

WITH SOME ROSES

  St. Valentine doth consecrate
To you—and to their happy fate—
These posies all importunate.

O that some bounteous deity
But one dear rosebud gave to me,
What paradise my heart would be!

A GARDEN LEGEND

Three roses in a garden shone,
  Three sister roses on one spray,
Their silken petals scarce full-blown
  From buds of only yesterday.

One looked East and the one looked West,
  And one longed for the South and sighed;
They all blushed at the Sun's behest,
  Grew pale and white at Evening tide.

As it was sung in the olden song
  An aimless errant Butterfly
On purple wings hurtling along
  With dawn down-floated from the sky.

The one, he touched her fingertips;
  He brushed another's satin brow;
But kissed the third rose full on the lips,
  And took her heart, and left a vow.

The roses gazing East and West
  Sighed lightly unto stars and moon;
The other rose tore at her breast,
  And faded away in her death swoon.

FORGET-ME-NOT

Little sweetheart
  Of the garden,
Flower child
  Who never grew up,
You have 'scaped
  The shocks that harden
And never drunk
  From sorrow's cup.

Blest intimation
  From above,
Confiding blue
  Forget-me-not,
Your gentle ways
  Make us to love,
Nor shall you ever
  Be forgot.

There was a child
  As sweet as you
Who lived with us
  A little while:

Life was dearer
  For things she'd do,
And heaven smiled
  When she did smile.

Her soul was in
  Her pensive eye;
And in our hearts
  She liveth yet:
Memory of her
  Shall not die,
For we can never,
  Never forget.

REQUIEM

I.

Now is the summer of poppy and sweet pea,
  And now, if ever, should my heart rejoice;
But, oh, their loveliness is grief to me;
  Their silence is the silence of a voice.

II.

For all of summer's flowers cannot avail
  To bring light to those eyes and kindle them
That to eternal winter closed on pale
  Narcissus' snow and Star-of-Bethlehem.

COLLIE BALLADS

HE WAS A GASH AN' FAITHFU' TYKE,
AS EVER LAP A SHEUGH OR DYKE.
HIS HONEST, SONSIE, BAWS'NT FACE
AYE GAT HIM FRIENDS IN ILKA PLACE.
HIS BREAST WAS WHITE, HIS TOWZIE BACK
WEEL CLAD WI' COAT O' GLOSSY BLACK;
HIS GAWCIE TAIL, WI' UPWARD CURL,
HUNG O'ER HIS HURDIES WI' A SWIRL.

—ROBERT BURNS

I.

SCOTT

Beware, beware, Wattie-the-cat, approach
nae closer my plate,
Sae grim, sae gruff, and sae grewsome where
I'm lyin' in wait:
I'm waitin' on my appetite, my wrath is
guidly sauce,
I gulp my bannock and gnaw my bane the
better when I'm cross.

Hearken my grumble and growl, hearken
my jaws how they do grate;
Nae closer, Wattie, on your life or I tremble
for your fate.
My teeth are quick to snap, an' eyes are
keen to watch their ain;
I'll eat my bannock at leisure, an' sae I'll
bury my bane.

I'll bury my bane beneath the ground—gri-
malkin, have a care:
I gie you a fair warnin' if I find you nib-
blin' there.
I wait upon my appetite, my wrath is
guidly sauce,
I bolt my bannock and gnaw my bane the
better when I'm cross.

II.

WATTIE-THE-CAT

How mickle a glutton you are, auld Scot,
I mean for you to know:
Sae mickle a niggard there walks nane
ither on the earth below.
I dinna want your filthy food you're
makin' sic to-do;
I dinna care a fig, a fig for all your hulla-
baloo.

I hae milk in the stable morn an' even
frae the cow,
I hae mice in the granary an' more mice
in the mow,
I hae rabbits 'mangst the cabbage, I hae
pinies on the wa',
I hae the plumpest dicky birds ever at my
beck an' ca'.

Shame on ye for a sulky gourmand, you
wad never miss
Twa-three dreeps o' grease or a shave o'
bread like this;
I ken aweel his supper time the laddie's
gien you meat,
When you hae slunk beneath the board and
cuddled at his feet.

III.

SCOTT HIS SECOND YAUP

Aunt Leeza, please, aunt Leeza, an' I'll
thank ye for my chair;
This half hour I've been lookin' and a-
longin' to be there:
I'll curl up like a cushion, and I'll snuggle
down so sleek,
My lang nose with my tipped tail 'ull play
at hide and seek.

The norther will be blawin', an' the snaw
is like to ball.
I've licked my paddies clean frae ice, clean
frae slush an' all.
Across the snaw a merry chase it was my
laddie led;
An' we went scootin' down the hill upon
my laddie's sled.

The fire will be feelin' guid, I'm laith to
keep awake;
The morrow will be comin' soon all for my
laddie's sake.
This lang time laddie's snorin' loud tucked
in his snaw-white bed;
An' I'm sae weary waitin' here 'tis maist
that I am dead.

Aunt Leeza, please, aunt Leeza, an' I'll
thank ye for my chair;
This half hour I've been lookin' and a-
longin' to be there:
I'll curl up like a cushion, and I'll snuggle
down so sleek,
My lang nose with my tipped tail 'ull play
at hide and seek.

IV.

AUNT LEEZA

Gae way frae here, gae way, you threapin'
pawky Scratch-the-door,
Wha wants your dirty foot I'd know, gae
stretch ye on the floor.
Noo quit your starin', surly dag, sic man-
ners ne'er I see,
I'll watch mysel a-gettin' up, dag, for
the likes of ye.

Your coat is lang 'nough to be saft, gae
lie again' the wa',
Your coat is lang 'nough, to be warm what
if the blasties blaw;
But noo you're out, but noo you're in, a
botheration, sure:
There is na rest 'neath shaggy hide of sic
a Scratch-the-door.

Your een glow bluer than twa coals; and
still you' re loomin' there
Betwixt me an' the cracklin' fire: I'll stand
for it na mair.
What is't to me you ran and lap? Auld
rascal, get ye gone,
An' rin an' loup in dagish dreams the winter
nicht till dawn.

Gae way atween the hearth an' me, you're
blacker nor a crow:
I'll have to licht the candle for my knittin'
else, I trow.
Gae rin alang to laddie noo, he's na tucked
in sae tight;
But I'll be boun" for twenty poun' he'll
share wi' you tonight.

V.

SCOTT HIS THIRD YAUP

O mither, mither, tell me where my laddie's
gane away;
He went the early mornin', and he's stay-
ing all the day.
I greet an' grane all up and down, an'
nowhere can I find
That lad o' mine in a' the world, aiblins
I'm gaein' blind.

O where's my laddie daundered off an'
left me here my lane?
O think you he's forgotten me for new
friends of his ain?
I've speered for him indoors an' out—he
is na in his room,
He is na with the lambs that munch amangst
the clover bloom.

He is na with the midden hens or neath
the hinny pear,
He is na in the kaleyard, fauld, or byre
any where;
And not alang the reedy burn, and not
ahint the stane,—
O mither, where's my laddie gane and left
me here my lane?

I sniffed his footsteps down the walk, I
sniffed them to the gate,
I sniffed them out upon the road, an' I
couldna, couldna wait:
I followed close his tracks sae dear, an'
they led up the hill,
An' nigh the wood to a wee hoose his foot-
steps went intil.

O mither, will my laddie ain nae come
home any mair?
It's I have lost my very soul, and O I'm
grievin' sair.
I'm eager noo to drive the kye that chow
their cood and wait,
We'll marshal them into the loanin wi'
ceremonial state.

If you ha' ever seen me glad, you'll see me
glad, I ken,
The happy moment that shall bring my
laddie hame again;
I'll fetch a mad and dizzy whirl so I won't
burst frae delight:
Ah, that I ever left the laddie ane wee
wink out of sight.

VI.

THE MITHER

Hush, hush your whine, an' look not on me,
Brown Eyes, sae forlorn;
You'll soon be wishin' that your laddie
never had been born:
He'll lug you up and down the land, an'
rin you all the while;
That silly pantin' tongue of yourn 'ull hang
out maist a mile.

What matter it if laddie's gaun, the mither's
still to hame:
She wullna traik about wi' ye, she wullna
play a game,
She wullna worrit you wi' tricks, an'
neither wull she tease
Those luvely silken hangin' ears wi' buzzin'
whitehead bees;

She wullna help dig mousie out away frae
nest and folk,
An' chase puir Bossie in the loan an' bark
at heels of Jock,
An' badger the scairt bunny, an' goad
the blinded mole,
An' pester squirrel, an' plague the toad,
his warted body an' soul.

But when the storm is in the sky, and
loud the thunders shake,
O what a place of refuge then the mither's
skirts do make!
An' when the patterin' paws 'ull bleed, an'
weary legs gae lame,
Whas breath but mither's and whas hand
'ull help to heal the same?

Your laddie wi' his bookbag will he nill
he's gane to school
To get a little learnin' sae he won't grow
up a fool:
Gae look wha's comin', stupid chiel, an'
poke nose to the pane;
I'll take an aith that lad o' yours 'ull soon
be hame again.

BIRD PIECES

UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE
WHO LOVES TO LIE WITH ME,
AND TURN HIS MERRY NOTE
UNTO THE SWEET BIRD'S THROAT—
COME HITHER, COME HITHER, COME HITHER!
HERE SHALL HE SEE
NO ENEMY
BUT WINTER AND ROUGH WEATHER.

—SHAKESPEARE

WITH HEARTS TO LOVE, WITH EYES TO SEE,
WITH EARS TO HEAR THEIR MINSTRELSY;
THROUGH US NO HARM, BY DEED OR WORD,
SHALL EVER COME TO ANY BIRD.

—ANONYMOUS

DRAGON'S BLOOD

Dragon's blood be my drink
  And Fafnir's heart my food
Till lark and boblink
  By me are understood;

Until the thrush has told
  The secrets in his breast,
And wren has ceased to scold,
  And cardinal confessed.

They know so many things
  To words do not belong:
The impulses are wings,
  The joyance that is song.

Like priests at each new day
  They chant sweet rhapsodies:
God taught them what to say;
  We'll listen on our knees.

IF I HAD THE GIFT

If I had the gift of tongues at call,
  If I knew the speech of the sweet wise birds,
I would not barter my knowledge for all
  Your poetry books and bibles of words.

WHISTLE, LARK, AND, ROBIN, SING

Whistle, lark; and, robin, sing;
Bluebird, make the hilltop ring;
Sparrow, break your swelling heart,
Till the last dun cloud depart.

Killdeer, call: free, wild redwing,
Frozen brooks with your chorusing:
Orpheus once drew rocks along,
Such power lies on the lips of Song.

Carol, carol joy heart-felt,
Till the snow of sorrow melt;
We for wonder of the thing
Catch joy at your caroling.

WOODPECKER

Spring is rapping at the door:
  Open, door, and let her in;
It is Spring, and runs before
  Her merry red-capped harlequin
    The woodpecker who is rapping,
      Rap-a-tap-tapping
Happy Spring's approach once more.

On the dead and withered top
  Of the old oak's hollow bole
He will never never stop
  While a living bud or soul
    's Wrapped in slumber: hear him rapping,
      Rap-a-tap-tapping,
Till the beaten echoes roll.

And the buds are glad to hear,
  And they startle and unfold;
It's the waking time o' year,
  And the napping time is told.
    Wake ye! Wake ye! Hark the rapping,
      Rap-a-tap-tapping!
Wake ye, buds and birds so bold!

Brave is he when winds blow chill
  And the bunting's yet awing
Has the vision and the will
  T' utter prophecies of spring.
    How he hammers, rap-rap-rapping,
      Rap-a-tap-tapping!
Hear the beggar blab the thing.

Mackerel skies and sharp March air
  Daunt you, jolly spiritualist,
  Not a whit: old friends you've missed
Sure will answer if they care.
    Waken mate and comrade, rapping,
      Rap-a-tap-tapping,
Till the dead wake everywhere.

FIRST BLUEBIRD

You loiterer in the treetops,
You pilgrim of the byways,
Blue-backed son of gladness,
  Have you strayed forth again,
And brought with you the springtide,
The violet-scented south wind,
The bursting bud and blossom,
  The sunshine and the rain?

We are rejoiced to see you,
We've met you other places,
We've passed you other seasons,
  As we must pass today;
Your coming O how timely!
Comes seed-time soon, then harvest,
Then icy blast of winter,
  And you are sped away,

O there are finer singers,
O there are rarer poets,
Singing down the byways
  Time in and out of mind:
The world stops not to listen,
The people hasten by them,
Yet somehow they keep singing
  In raptures unconfined.

And somehow through the ages
With measure unabated
In gathering strength and sweetness
  Their spirits hover near us:
So when the norther's purring
And pallid flakes are sifted,
Come unto souls grown lonely
  Visions of you to cheer us.

You come to us in sadness,
You say to us the missing—
The dead are deemed dead only
  To winter and his crew;
Inspiring us with lofty
Scorn for these dusty trifles,
For life that's more abundant
  Steads yet the bards and you.

CANADA GEESE

I.

A thread of silver flung across the sky,
Vibrating in the March sunlight;
Confused cries, like the yelping of dogs,
On a wild equinoctial night;
A thrill that stirs the stagnant blood
Of wingless earthbound creatures;
A tug at the heart to venture forth
On enterprises far from home:
Wild geese are flying north,
And spring is come!

II.

Again a wedge-shaped line against the sky,
And wolfpack cries again on stormy nights;
They make a great to-do as they go by,
The wild geese flying south:
Summer is going,
And winter's trumpets will soon be blowing.

RUBY CROWN

Sap pulsing up,
  Skies bending down,—
Deep in leaf cup,
  That's Ruby Crown:
    Chief Bud Inspector
    And Grub Detector,
      Tu-tu-tu-tuing,
    Drunk with life's nectar.

Spring—the beginning;
  Summer—the end,
When leaves are thinning,
  And fruits downward bend:
    He is the dapper,
    Trim whippersnapper,
      Tu-tu-tu-tuing
    Tree scout and trapper.

What does he say,
  Sunshine or rain,
Darting away
  And back again?
    Persnickety creature,
    He says, "I beseechyer,
      Come 'ere, little bug,
And lemme eatcher, eatcher, eatcher."

MOCKING BIRD

There comes
The memory
Of an April morn
With dew,
New day,
And a wonder born:

Remoteness made
Intimate;
Secret depths stirred;
Apple bloom;
Matin song
Of the mocking bird.

PHOEBE

The pewee is a sad
  And solitary bird,
But welcome is his name
  Whenever it is heard.
My grandmother loved him well;
  She often used to say:
"Children, the pewee calls,
  And summer's here to stay."

STARLING AND HOUSE SPARROW

  Garrulous starlings,
Boisterous house sparrows,
I hoped to keep them
Out of my verses;
It can't be done, though:
For good or for evil
They will creep in,
Spite of the devil.

THE ROBIN AND THE APPLE TREES

The robin loves the apple trees:
He loves them better than do bees:
With April when the blossoms come,
Those heavy-laden ladrones will hum
O in and out and out and in
Whilst nectar treasures are to win,
Whilst brimming cups of sweetness drip,
They will sail and dive and dip
Into that bending billowy sea
Of light and glory foaming free;
And they will search the orchard ways
Till they are lost mid the blue haze
From end to end o' April days.
But when the petals curl and fall,
Where are the bees? The rascals bawl
Adown the locusts' honied glade,
And ply anew their thievish trade.
The robin's stay lasts clear through May
And many a month to come, I say.

The robin loves the apple trees;
He loves them any time you please.
Even while the March winds roared among
The naked branches, there he clung
And marked with keen solicitude
And slantwise head how up the wood

The lazy sap crept into bud;
He broods over firstling leaf and flower,
And waits expectant 'gainst the hour
When the plump fruits on limb bent low
Through crisping foliage ruddily glow;
And when the winds set all aquiver
The last sere leaves, he'll hop and shiver,
Shiver and run in the scant sun
Till down they rustle one by one.

The robin loves the apple trees,
There courting days do never cease,
For there in evening sun or shower
On topmost spray he'll blithely hover
To serenade his lady's bower,
To wake the morning with his call,
Singing his wise recessional,
Or chant a favorite vesper hymn
Far in the twilight waning dim:
Ah, high above he singeth of
The apple trees that own his love.

The robin loves the apple trees,
He buildeth sure his nest in these.
The hearty fellow maketh merry
With all the rout i' Purple Mulberry,
Or dines at sign of Bursting Cherry;

He bolts the worm at early dawn
Upon the green and glistening lawn;
His red breast brushes off the dew;
He hunts the garden through and through;
But ere you finish counting ten
Why he is up and back again,
After the quest back to his nest
Among the apples he loves best.

The robin loves the apple trees;
They see him take his hour of ease
Hard by his lusty brood and mate,
Not vigilant less but more sedate.
Securely there close percheth he
Amid the shadowed greenery
When all around that secret spot
Glare little suns on noondays hot.
The flicker flaps the towering oak,
The killdeer wheels in air like a spoke,
The wren will tease whatever he sees,
Robin keeps 'mong his apple trees.

SWIFT

Out of the crisp and morning blue,
  Out of the vibrant air,
The swift darts down the chimney flue
  To feed his nestlings there.

From pockets on the sooty wall
  The sooty fledglings cry:
And all about dark hangs a pall,
  Save for one patch of sky.

When March-time's crackling snowflakes whirl
  Adown the Stygian well
And wreaths of smoke at top uncurl
  With pungent hickory smell,

I think of summer's tenants then,
  And wonder where they stay,
On ledges shadowed in what glen,
  'Neath what skies far away.

GOLDFINCH

As he bounds along on the waves of song
The goldfinch has strange powers:
His voice is sweet with a rythmic beat
From other shores than ours;
Though summer cling or winter sting
As overhead he hovers,
He has a way would make us stay
And stoop to gather flowers.

EAGLE

I've never seen a king,
But I've seen an eagle soaring all alone,
Scanning prostrate earth
From his airy throne.

I've seen eagles, too, in cages,
And I think I'd rather be
A dead eagle than a caged eagle,
An eagle without liberty.

VIREO

Let fame be; fortune fly—
What care we? You and I
Love the wood, love the sky.
This way our fortunes lie—
Walk this way, and ask not why.

Shout at joy perching near;
Happiness and peace are here;
Through the leaves pixies peer.
This way, lad, never fear;
This way our path lies clear.

Over here! This way, lad!
This way! Life is not so bad
If we sing when we're glad,
And sing on when we're sad
Till we've lost the griefs we had.

BLUE JAY

A chortle, a yell
Like clapper of bell
That's knapping in hell:

It's only that lout
The blue jay about
With uncanny shout—

As handsome a pest
As ever with zest
Has scuttled a nest.

MEADOWLARK

Like sparkles from a diamond
The meadowlark's clear call
Scintillates from earth:
"Earth, thou art near!
Earth, thou art dear!
And God is over all!"

BROWN THRASHER

The brown thrush is a preacher
Of orthodox renown:
His text is from the Bible
The birds have warbled down;

His pulpit is the greenwood;
His minster is the sky;
And all his congregation
One sinner that is I.

CATBIRD

Caruso's in the garden—
Now he wears a crown,
Now he is the lover,
And now he is the clown.

WOOD THRUSH

List, list!

Eerily
Through the wood
Ouphen cries
O' mystery
Luring me
Lure aye.

Break o' day
Earlier
Than the dawn
Lure on.

Hours after
Evening bell
Fairy laughter
Weaves a spell;
For its own
Doth the wold
Catch and hold
Shards of tone.

Hist, hist!

Hush—
The thrush.

NIGHTHAWK

Under a ragged sky
The nighthawk plods on high
Shrilling his vesper cry.

As in a giddy swound
Headlong unto the ground
He dips through the profound—

Yet swerves; and from wing bone
Hark the sepulchral tone
Dank depths of hell had known

When on its vaporous rings
Smote hollow echoings
Of fallen angels' wings.

Then up, up, up again,
Piercing Heaven's ear with pain
As he panteth for the rain.

BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO

The cuckoo drops in morning's satined coffer
His unctuous orbed notes one by one,
As miser counts close-hoarded golden ducats,
And dial tells spent hours of the sun;

As plummet raindrops slowly earthward tremble
From rayed leaf-edges of the thorn;
As languid tears might shake from long eye-lashes
Of the Olympians when they mourn.

SONG SPARROW

High on a leafless apple spray
Quivering you chant, and your blithe lay
Unto the hazy sun and the day
Draweth you near to me.

Though every wildwing note be still
From deepest wood and farthest hill,
Your childlike throat swells yet to spill
A timid melody.

Poet unknown of all the throng,
You will not linger with us long,
Singing your Indian summer song
Over autumn fell and lea.

CARDINAL GROSBEAK

I.

Live flame against earth's altar screen;
Red berry in the evergreen
For weaving wreaths on Christmas E'en;
Gay garment of Red Riding Hood
Vibrating through the deep dim wood;
Incarnate drop of poet's blood
Insatiate clay forbears to drink;
A rubric writ in living ink;
Hennaed and rouged and lac-dyed, I think;
Ensanguined stain upon the snow
From bud of murdered rose below
Whose crimson wraith flits to and fro;
Warm brand to blind the sunlit day;
Mad meteor from the far-away;
Dawn's embers kindled in the grey;
Noon's will-o'-wisp like glowworm bright;
Quick guidon of the hosts of light,
The marching hours that battle with night;
Damask of rayed declining sun
Suffusing the west when day is done
Like lightning fires that have run;
A ruddy-grained perfervid flute;
Exotic bloom and wondrous fruit,
That paints the air and has no root;
A maple leaf to gladden fall;
A torch to flare in winter's hall,
Wingest, O Cardinal!

II.

Wise summons to the forest walk;
Chatter of water and loud leaf-talk;
March wind piping through dead cornstalk;
Sailor of fields who calls ahoy;
Spirit of Pan singing lyrics of joy;
Blithe whistling of exuberant boy;
Laughter of lass whose lips are wild,
Naiad or nymph or Faery child,
Unblessed, unchristened, undomiciled;
Voice of a cold and crystalline morn;
Silvery blast of Elfinland horn
Across the snow invisibly borne;
Quaint ballad of some fear-haunted vale;
Cry of a lost soul wandering pale
To lure folk from the beaten trail;
Sharp questioner of the parvenu;
Tone of a reed Life breathes into
With fingering free from passion's cue;
Anthem that soars to heaven and yet
Forbids the mortal heart to forget
Warm feel of sun and cling of wet;
Paean of pulses that round out our fate;
Psalm of the clod; dust's trumpet elate;
Clear clarion of the ultimate;
Capping the top of ecstacy's call
With God heard in the interval,
Singest, O Cardinal!

CROW

Crows fly high,
Wind and dry;
Crows fly low,
Rain or snow.

Hi! Hi! Hi!
Caw! Caw! Caw!
Here are the shades
Of dead Chippewa,
Conestoga, Mohawk,
Come to the powwow.
Here are the warriors,
Here are the chieftains,
Here are the weatherwise
Medicine masters.
Flapping big black hands
From high lands and low lands
The crow people come.
To the boom and the hum
Of the wind's tomtom
The young bucks prance
In a wild tribal dance,
Diving and leaping,
Trailing and creeping,
Spinning and stalking,
Rattling and squawking,
Whooping and eddying,
Thumping the giddy air
With heel of wing;

While the ancient crows,
Sages and counselors,
Like beasts on all fours
Haunched in straggly rows,
Stretching their empty crops,
Bark at the echoes
From the white oak tops.
Beneath sullen skies
They yell tribal cries.
Caw! Caw! Caw!
Yo! Yo! Yo!
Give them the peace sign:
Seneca, Cherokee,
Huron, Chickasaw,
Sioux, Pottawatomie,
Apache, Comanche,
Cheyenne, Arapahoe.

Crows fly high,
Wind and dry;
Crows fly low,
Rain or snow.

MOTH'S DESIRE

I CAN GIVE NOT WHAT MEN CALL LOVE,
BUT WILT THOU ACCEPT NOT
THE WORSHIP THE HEART LIFTS ABOVE
AND THE HEAVENS REJECT NOT,—
THE DESIRE OF THE MOTH FOR THE STAR,
OF THE NIGHT FOR THE MORROW,
THE DEVOTION TO SOMETHING AFAR
FROM THE SPHERE OF OUR SORROW?

—SHELLEY

STILL AND STILL YOU SIGH AND PLEAD,
STILL AND STILL I LOVE YOU,
WHILE THE LITTLE BREEZES SPEED
BUTTERFLIES ABOVE YOU.
STILL YOU LOVE ME, WHILE THE SUN
STANDS SO HIGH ABOVE US.
BUTTERFLIES, WHEN DAY IS DONE,
WHO WILL THINK TO LOVE US?

—CHARLOTTE PRENTISS

TAUGENICHTSLIED

Ich, ich bin ein Taugenichts,
  Werde nichts aus mir machen,
Denn ich lebe nur im Traum
  Und traeume nur im Wachen.

Hab' mich in eine Schoen' verliebt,
  Schoenste von schoenen Damen:
Weisz leider ihre Wohnung nicht
  Weder auch ihr Namen.

Weisz nur dasz sie Augen hat
  Wie im Blau die Sterne;
Weisz nur dasz sie Fueschen hat,
  Die folg' ich allzugerne;

Weisz nur dasz sie Lippen hat,—
  Nichts anderes will ich wissen,—
So oeffnet sich eine Purpurros',
  Ach, wie moecht ich sie kuessen!

EXPECTANCY

How shall I know him, fraught with fate,
For whom I surely wait?

O by what mystic word or sign
Will my true love be mine?

With trumpet sound and roll of drum,
Or silent will he come?

Flushed with the first draught of fame's mead,
Or lifting lips that bleed?

With arms to shield me and embrace,
Or wanting hands of grace?

I know not by what throbbing chance,
In what strange circumstance:

I only know that, fraught with fate,
He comes whom I await.

ADVENT

I.

I'll come with a kiss to claim you, love,
    At early peep of dawn,
Whispering this—the name you love
    Like winds that sigh on the lawn,
Till the listening, glistening pearl drops above
    Are vanished quite and are gone
With the too much bliss, O my delicate dove,
    My beautiful-breasted swan.

II.

I'll linger a day but only a night,
    (That your dreams of me be true,)
Come like a May-born bloom of delight,
    The sudden stars and the dew;
Like the dew and the stars that come by night
    I shall come, my love, to you,
And tremble away on the rosy light
    With a bird's song in the blue.

ENDYMION

Skyward in vain I used to reach
  With arms so short and hands so small
For bird, for cloud, for moon and star,
  And gulfs of blue overarching all.

Now heavy hand and aching arm
  Need nevermore snatch at the skies,
For heaven is come down to me
  And shines, beloved, in your eyes.

COGNOSCENTI

The girl is loath to answer yes;
She would rather have you guess
  Whether love is coming or going;
And after all it seems just so:
Love's not a matter of yes or no,
  But the godlike rapture of knowing.

DEMETER

I.

O would you were a reaper, love,
  And I the grain for reaping!
My kisses are to harvest all
  For you I've long been keeping.

II.

O would you were a gleaner, love,—
  My heart is ripe for gleaning—
That you might lift me to your breast,
  There lightly to be leaning!

III.

O would you were a thresher, love,
  Your heart the flail a-beating!
My heart should leap to meet your own,
  And yield its love at meeting.

ROBIN SONG

I.

You noisy old robin,
  With jerky old tune,
O' mornings you wake me
  From sweet dreams too soon.
Who cares for your sunshine?
  Who cares for your song?
My heart in its gladness
  Sings all the day long.

II.

No bird at my window,
  No sun warm and bright;
No guest half so welcome
  As day after night:
O sing again, robin,
  Bid all the world stir;
Go waken my true love,
  And carol for her.

VOLKSLIED

I.

Charlottchen, Charlottchen,
  Geh' mit mir ins Gras:
Wie pfeifen die Voegel,
  Wie doppelt der Has';
Wie hoch ist der Himmel,
  Wie glitzern die Stern';
Wie ha'n doch die Buben
  Die Maedchen so gern!

II.

Charlottchen, Charlottchen,
  Geh' mit mir ins Feld:
Wie frisch ist der Morgen,
  Wie weit ist die Welt;
Wie locken die Berge,
  Wie ruft uns die Fern';
Wie ha'n doch die Maedchen
  Die Buben so gern!

FRUITION

How will you ever know,
  Tell me, you wild young thing?
You grow like the flowers grow;
  For you the wild birds sing.

Where was the bird's song caught?
  The flower dipt in what hue?
Lady, that look so fraught
  With longing who gave to you?

In wistful eyes what light,
  On winsome cheek what glow,
About you hangs what bright
  Something of long ago?

What pilgrims venturing far,
  What voyagers at sea,
Helped make you that you are,
  No queen yet lived to be?

What ages through warm lay
  In brooding depths what spark
Has set on you today
  A visible soul-mark?

Like moths which come by night
  They passed who dreamed and dared,
Not knowing glory's sight,
  Nor caring how they cared.

Like moths we feed the fire
  Who all too greatly care:
You are the world's desire
  And the dead ages' despair.

GOOD NIGHT

I.

Good night, dear heart, good night!
How shall I say "Good night?"
I'll say it with a sigh
As soundless, love, yet deep
As dreams fallen from the sky
When all the night-winds sleep.
Only your soul shall hear
The call of my soul near,
And throb like shadows that thrill
To voice of whip-poor-will;
Like birds light-breasting the lake
To music wide waters make;
Or thousands with beat of wing
One cricket sets to sing,
Such breathing in the grass
As round the world does pass,
Till slumbering fields that lie
Tangled in soft moonlight
Shall stir in dreams and sigh,
"Good night!"

II.

Good night, dear heart, good night!
How shall I say "Good night?"
I'll say it with a kiss—
O parted lips, take this!
O cheeks and starlit eyes,

Deep-glowing, sypmathize!
The sphinx-moth over the rose
So lingers for he knows
All else is little worth;
The rosebud lifts on stem.
The stars stoop down to earth,
And gropes she not for them?
And fireflies brush a spark
Against the dusky dark;
And clouds on breezes meet;
They mingle and they greet:
Must we guess at the bliss
Even clouds feel in their flight
That close and clasp and kiss
"Good night?"

SPINNING TRILOGY

WHO CAN FIND A VIRTUOUS WOMAN? FOR HER PRICE IS FAR ABOVE RUBIES.

SHE SEEKETH WOOL, AND FLAX, AND WORKETH WILLINGLY WITH HER HANDS.

SHE LAYETH HER HANDS TO THE SPINDLE, AND HER HANDS HOLD THE DISTAFF.

—PROVERBS 31:10, 13, 19.

SPINNING TRILOGY

I.

AT THE REEL

Turn, turn thy reel, maiden, till the skein's full.
(Blood has na waked yet, bud has na shoved yet.)
Wind, wind the fair flax; wind, wind the wan wool.
(Thou hast na spun yet, thou hast na loved yet,
Wispy-tressed maid.)

Glance, glance, waxen fingers, dance mid the thread.
(Bud has na bloomed yet, ye hae na bled yet.)
Dream, dream, linten buds, pale as ye were dead.
(Thou art unwooed yet, thou art unwed yet,
Lawny-white maid.)

Still, still the gray world; mute, the mute gay song.
(Bird na put breast yet intil the nest yet.)
Sweet spring, hasten home! Sweet love, stay not long!
(Looks hae na burnt yet, lips hae na blest yet
Lily-throat maid.)

Blow, blow, westlin wind—soon shall the south blow.
(Sap has na crept yet, heart has na leapt yet.)
Rest, rest, siller wings, beneath the siller snow.
(Thou hast na sighed yet, thou hast na wept yet,
Dove-sleekit maid.)

II.

AT THE WOOL WHEEL

What could the green leaf but uncurl?
  What durst the bird but sing?
Where lives the lad loves not a girl
  When it is in the spring?
I gie my dizzy wheel a whirl,
  I wipe frae cheeks a tear:
The mavis whistles and the merle,
  But thou art not anear,
    Anear!
  But thou art not anear.

Blue bends the sky above my head,
  Thou saidst mine eyes were blue;
Green grows the grass beneath my tread,
  Bediamonded with dew.
Wi' dizzy turn my wheel is sped;
  I looked for thee at day:
Thou needst na ask me now to wed,
  For I hae steppit away,
    Away!
  For I hae steppit away.

A scarlet wing went flittin' by:
  Whas hand is on the latch?
My lad would chase a butterfly
  That he will never catch.
A ruddy throat rang frae green tree:
  Whas lips breathe in my ear?
I heed na what thou'rt tellin' me,
  Thou needst na lisp so near,
            So near!
  Thou needst na lisp so near.

A rosy flower up and blusht
  Green tangles all among:
Whas fingers stole, where sae it flusht
  The laverock over it sung,
An' like an April spate has brusht
  My posy frae the brae?
But wheel and spindle bath are husht,
  An' far my heart's away,
            Away!
  An' far my heart's away.

III.

AT THE FLAX WHEEL

Down adown the golden leaves a-falling
  Hide the faery gold beneath the haunted tree;
Heart o' mine it grieves, it grieves, so soon
    to hear love calling,
  Poor my hands they hold no golden gown for me.

Down adown deep in my soul I wonder
  An the bride of dole or dowry aught shall see;
Kame of gold sh' 'as none, sh' 'as none to keep
    her gold locks under:
  Faery gold has done what goodly thing by me?

Down adown in undelved earth low-lying
  Sleeps my faery gold until I bid it be;
Golden brooch and girdle scarce are worth,
    are worth the sighing:
  I hae love to fold around the heart o' me.

LAND OF LOST CONTENT

THAT IS THE LAND OF LOST CONTENT,
I SEE IT SHINING PLAIN,
THE HAPPY HIGHWAYS WHERE I WENT,
AND CANNOT COME AGAIN.

—A. E. HOUSMAN

FLIESZE, FLIESZE, LIEBER FLUSZ!
NIMMER WERD ICH FROH;
SO VERRAUSCHTE SCHERZ UND KUSZ,
UND DIE TREUE SO.

—GOETHE

SO, WE'LL GO NO MORE A-ROVING
SO LATE INTO THE NIGHT,
THOUGH THE HEART BE STILL AS LOVING,
AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT.

FOR THE SWORD OUTWEARS ITS SHEATH,
AND THE SOUL WEARS OUT THE BREAST,
AND THE HEART MUST PAUSE TO BREATHE,
AND LOVE ITSELF HAVE REST.

—BYRON.

OVERTURE

Time in his treasury
  Has many gifts in store;
Patience is the one key
  That will unlock the door.

Solace is there for me,
  Sweet quietude to pour
Balsam and nard pardy
  Into the wounds of yore.

Love, thou hast routed me!
Fame, thou hast clouted me!
Fortune, hast flouted me!

  No matter,
  No matter,
  No matter.

PREMONITION

Blithe lark and bluebird—
  Yesterday—
Had piped the shadow
  Of care away.

Tonight, tonight,
  The owlet's call
Shudders a spell
  Over us all.

O for a heart
  Above this fear!
O for a joy
  Forever here!

WATER THE ROSES

I.

Water the roses,
Water the roses with wine:
So spiced and sweetened and mulled
Till by their own fragrance lulled
The drunkards may all be culled
For her who is to be mine.
Water the roses,
Water the roses with wine.

II.

Water the roses,
Water the roses with blood:
'Twill dye them a deeper red
Than those on earth that have fed,
And maybe they'll live when dead
Lies passion slain i' the bud.
Water the roses,
Water the roses with blood.

III.

Water the roses,
Water the roses with tears:
That they may blossom and blow,
And wither and drop where they grow,
So she will never know
The hurt I bear through the years.
Water the roses,
Water the roses with tears.

BUTTERFLIES

Butterflies
That go
From bloom to bloom
Make a brave show
Beneath blue skies
In the meadow room.

The mob
Of fellows
That bob
In saffrons and yellows
Indistinguishable
Among the primroses—
Who can count noses?

It puzzles the redwing
Even to tell
Insect from flower:
He will bring
Grim death . . .

But that scarlet one
Drifting in the sun
Nonchalantly
Hour by hour—
He does not hide.

He defies duress:
Out of his side
He distills
A bitterness
That makes the black darter
Pause and shun.

My soul is a scarlet butterfly—
Oh, will it never let me die!

MARAH

The beetles and the midges dance
  On parching leaves of cherry;
They patter, curvet, and they prance,
  And all the night make merry.

The stars lie withered in their bed,
  Unpetaled and forlorn:
I kiss the cracked lips of the dead,
  And weep for the unborn.

THROUGH LUCID EYES

I.

Through lucid eyes who see the stars,
  Who see the stars through lucid eyes,
Set isolate between cloud bars
  Or myriad-clustered in the skies,
They see the stars, the brilliant stars,
  Who see the stars through lucid eyes.

II.

But who weteyed and wan behold
  The selfsame stars through misty tears,
What gleam and glister there of gold,
  Rubescent, sapphire, emerald spheres
Through misty tears do they behold,
  Beholding stars through tears, through tears!

AFTER-THOUGHT

I passed a rose by the wayside
  And gave so little heed;
Blind and dumb passed by it,
  Blossoming to my need.

Blind in the dust of the highway,
  Dumb for a listening ear,
How should I know of rosebuds
  The dearest would prove so dear?

How should I know as ever
  The long, long road led on
A glimpse of one rose-face would haunt me
  When all the roses were gone?

OF MANY LITTLE THINGS

Life is made up of many little things,
Little daily acts, little commonalities,
And a few big things—but which are these?
Maybe the big things are only little things.

Oh, love's a big big thing—when we're in love;
Live's prizes are so big—till they are won;
But Time is always big: Time's never done,
Before all things and after, beneath, above.

CHRONOS

I am the riddle of the ages.
I am the enigma of existence.
I am the world's great mystery.
I am sphinx of the desert.
I am Nirvana of the temple.
I am an equation of Einstein.
I am axiom and paradox.
I am alpha and omega.
I am nadir and zenith.
I am title page and colophon.
Death is an open book compared with me.
I am the shadow of life,
Ever falling behind,
Yet ever relentlessly pursuing,
Ever futiley pursued.
For that which stands still I move;
For that which moves I rest.
I broadcast and posterity receives.
I sow and the millenium reaps.

I am eternity plus.
I am infinity minus.
I am a component of nothing;
Nothing is compounded without me.
I am the music of the spheres.
I am the rider of the pinions of light.
I am a leap in the dark.
I am the plummet line of space.
I am the x-ray of all eventualities.
I am an immortal moment
In the depths of the starred night.
I am an electric spark that flashes
From everlasting to everlasting.
I am the spawning mother of events.
I am the bottomless pit
In which all creation is sunken.
I am the masterpiece of God.
I am the Big Ben of the universe.
I am the time clock of the Whole Works.
What am I?

LIFE—LOVE—DEATH

I.

Life to the worm, life to the grass,
Life to the bird that sings in the tree:
They know not today tomorrow they pass;
They are as happy as they can be.
Death to the singer, life to the song;
None of us here shall sing very long.
The brave and the fair give over the dance
Like feathers are flung on the winds of chance–
Life is a little thing.

II.

Out of a look our loves are born,
And with the self-same look they die:
The heart that beats elate at morn
Shattered ere eventide shall lie.
A breath is an age to love's brief pant,
A bubble is as adamant.
But broken hearts will heal again;
They'll grow like lizards' tails—amen!
Love is a little thing.

III.

Death is a step from room to room,
Over so soon we hardly know:
Whether it be to rot in the tomb
Or ever to tread in a heavenly glow.

Death is completion, death's a beginning;
More time for peace, and less time for sinning.
Past like the day at set of sun;
Come like the darkness when day is done—
Death is a little thing.

NEW DAYS, NEW JOYS

Frustrate the joys of life may be,
Yet each day brings fresh joy to me:
Dawns come and go, and shall I pine,
If one dawn is not always mine?

Yesterday's roses fade away,
Yesterday's bud is rose today,
And surely from tomorrow's stem
Roses shall bloom to rival them.

ALONE

I have no fear of sorrow's crown,
Alone to wear it.
Though fate may cheat me of renown,
What were my merit?
But, oh! to hear birds welcome spring
And loud declare it,
Without you see the blossoming
Herbage inherit
Earth's loveliness so drags me down
I scarce can bear it:
Enjoyment is an empty thing
With none to share it.

EIN ANDERES MAL

I.

Sie ist vorbei, die frohe Zeit;
Die Jahre der Vergangenheit,
  Sie sind vorbei, und lasz sie sein:
  Bleibt uebrig noch der alte Wein,
Und Bacchus zwingt zur Lust and Leid
        Ein anderes Mal.

II.

Ein anderes Mal wird es gelingen
Dem Fruehling Pracht hervorzubringen,
  In Augen wenn die Liebe glueht;
  Die Rosen sind nicht all verblueht,
Und Voegelein haben Mut zu singen
        Ein anderes Mal.

III.

Ein anderes Mal da werden wieder
Solch suesze langvergessene Lieder
  Ertoenen aus der Wald-Kapelle
  Dasz man entziehe von der Stelle,
Ach, nimmermehr die matten Glieder
        Ein anderes Mal!

FAERY SONGS

SHED NO TEAR—O SHED NO TEAR!
THE FLOWER WILL BLOOM ANOTHER YEAR.
WEEP NO MORE—O WEEP NO MORE!
YOUNG BUDS SLEEP IN THE ROOT'S WHITE CORE.
DRY YOUR EYES—O DRY YOUR EYES,
FOR I WAS TAUGHT IN PARADISE
TO EASE MY BREAST OF MELODIES.

—JOHN KEATS

BEWARE! BEWARE!
HIS FLASHING EYES, HIS FLOATING HAIR!
WEAVE A CIRCLE ROUND HIM THRICE,
AND CLOSE YOUR EYES WITH HOLY DREAD,
FOR HE ON HONEY-DEW HATH FED,
AND DRANK THE MILK OF PARADISE.

—COLERIDGE

FIRST THINGS

First peep
  O' daylight;
First sleep
  In the night;

First sun,
  First shower,
First bird,
  First flower;

First walk
  By the brook;
First talk,
  First book;

First star
  Shines above;
First wish,
  First love;

First boots,
  First toys
Go to bed
  With little boys;

First dolls,
  First curls
Go to bed
  With little girls;

First hug,
  First kiss,
Daddy gives
  His Little Miss;

First prayer,
  First plan,
Mother makes
  For Little Man:

Last is worst,
  First is best,
Silence is
  All the rest.

THE WAY TO THIMBLELAND

"Which is the way to Thimbleland?"
  I asked a grumpy man.
"There is no way, there's no such place,"
  And nowheres off he ran.

"Which is the way to Thimbleland?"
  I asked all up and down;
And there were none to answer me
  In country or in town.

At last I met a sage who said,
  (And he must know the elves,)
"We've but one way to Thimbleland—
  It is to lose ourselves.

"You lose the person and the shape
  You have in Workaday;
You lose your cares, you lose your wares,
  And then you lose your way.

"And when you come to Thimbleland,
  You change to Thimbleing:
If you were true in Workaday,
  Why, there you'll be a king.

"A finger's big as charger there,
  A needle is a lance,
And you shall find a princess there
  Will match you in a dance."

RAG-TAG RHYMES

Out of the battle — scars;
  Out of the many — one;
Out of the night — the stars;
  Out of the east — the sun.

Out of the earth — green grass;
  Out of the maze — a way;
Out of our longing — a lass;
  Out of our faith — a fay.

Out of our doubt — despair;
  Out of our sins — a slave;
Out of our folly — care;
  Out of our cares — the grave.

Out of the turmoil — rest;
  Out of sweet slumber — a dream;
Out of the weeds — a nest;
  Out of the cloud — a gleam.

Out of the brier — a rose;
  Out of the vision — a deed;
Out of our blindness — prose;
  Out of the waste — a reed.

Out of our piping — glee;
  Out of our tears — a note;
Out of the forest — a tree;
  Out of the tree — a cote.

Out of the cote — a dove;
  Out of the heavens — blue;
Out of my heart — my love;
  Out of God's sunshine — you!

MORNING GLORY

Glory woke
  Upon the green;
Glory wore
  A purple sheen:

New bright,
  Dew bright,
Ere it was
  Daylight;

Glowworm,
  Moonbeam,
Satin-silky
  Like a dream;

Glory put
  Her glory on,
And was up
  To meet the dawn.

Fairy wings,
  Tired kings,
Tearful queens,
  Fearing things—

Where will they
  Hide away?
Glory cradles
  Elf and fay.

They tuck in
  The edges tight:
Good-bye, day!
  Night, goodnight!

Glory put
  Her glory on:
Glory be!
  Glory's gone!

A GAME FOR RAINY DAYS

There is a game that Laddie plays
When he's alone on rainy days.

It is a simple little game
That comes as easily as your name.

You don't pretend you're big and bold,
And doing deeds like knights of old;

Or stalking Redskins on the plains;
Or hanging pirates up in chains.

You close your eyes and keep quite still:
Then let things happen as they will.

You just forget about yourself.
Like that! you're changed into an elf.

You hear the patter of fairy feet
Upon the roof and down the street;

And fairy fingers in the rain
Are tapping gently on the pane.

The room becomes a deep dense wood
In which you think you're lost for good.

And tiny folk, when breezes stir,
Float by on wings of gossamer.

The green rugs turn to mossy banks,
Where fairies scramble at their pranks.

Rich flower scent and sweet birdsong
Go with you as you leap along;

Until you reach a glassy lake
So smooth and clear you think 'twill break.

Of course, it's not a lake at all,
But the gilt mirror on the wall.

A swan is gliding white as snow,
Blue skies above and blue below.

He draws a lovely seashell boat
By silver strings around his throat.

Maybe the queen of Elfinland
Goes sailing there with all her band.

Maybe it's Puck or Oberon—
But in a trice the vision's gone!

For just as you're on point to see,
The grandfather's clock strikes "One, two, three!"

And jerks you back from World-Away
With quizzical smile that seems to say:

"The World-Awake has need of you:
There are so many things to do.

"Quicksilver time slips through my hands—
There is no time in faery lands.

"No time! No time! And time shall last
When other things all, all have passed!"

WITCH DOCTOR

Witch's wiles and warlock's tricks—
  O what a happy day!
Black cats and broom sticks,
  And such a hex to lay.
    Hex! Hex! Hex!
      O what a happy day!
    Hurry to the powwow man:
      He'll blow their spells away.

Read a little hex-book
  If you would be wise;
Learn to raise the spirits,
  To charm and exorcise.

Hide a heaven-letter
  On lintel of the door;
Gaze into earth-mirror
  And be warned before.

Baby has the taking-off—
  Measure him with thread;
Goiter, wart and graveyard cough
  Will yield to hand that's dead.
    Hex! Hex! Hex!
      O what a happy day!
    Hurry to the powwow man:
      He'll blow their spells away.

WHAT THE FAIRY SINGS

I.

Fairy lies and fairy sighs,
This is what the fairy cries:
Mortal love brings little joy
Unto mortal girl or boy?.
Lips are cold before they kiss;
Hearts grow old awaiting bliss;
Human vision never sees
Happiness until she flees.

II.

Fairy bells and fairy spells,
This is what the fairy tells;
Little children know the way
To the land of elf and fay;
Poets often journey there,
Leaving earthly fret and care—
Out of merlamb fleece they weave
Dreamy shapes of make-believe.

III.

Fairy rings and fairy wings,
This is what the fairy sings:
Love is blest in faery lands;
Kissing's free as clasping hands;
Hearts are never broken there;
Truth alone is spoken there;
Happiness there like the sun
Shines on each and every one.

IN WINTER WHERE?

I.

In winter where do the fairies go?
Do they hide like the flowers snug under the snow,
Or fly far away with the birds to the South?
I'll kiss the fairy who tells on the mouth.

II.

The little folk clad in mantles of green
And brown and buff jerkins, bleak season unseen
How do they hide from sudden surprise?
I'll kiss the fairy who tells on the eyes.

III.

Do they frolic like juncoes mid whirling white flakes?
Do they patter where daggery icicle breaks?
Do they find rosy faces to pinch and to tweak?
I'll kiss the fairy who tells on the cheek.

IV.

Are there fairies of frost like faries of rain?
Are there fairies who paint ghost grass on the pane
And bejewel the trees by a turn of a wand?
I'll kiss the fairy who tells on the hand.

LULLABY

The babes of summer are dead,
The hearts that fluttered have fled,
Each in its winter bed
  The springtide blossoms are sleeping.

Each in its cradle of down,
Silver under the brown,
All in a silken gown
  Flower and leaf are sleeping.

High on the bough hung aright,
Nestle you snug and tight,
Folded in from the night,
  So deeply, deeply sleeping.

Sleep, little buds, sleep, sleep,
Till the warm breezes creep,
And the merry birds cheep—
  So sweetly, sweetly sleeping.

UNDER THE FIG TREE

JESUS SAW NATHANAEL COMING TO HIM, AND SAITH OF HIM, BEHOLD AN ISRAELITE INDEED, IN WHOM THERE IS NO GUILE!

AND NATHANAEL SAITH UNTO HIM, WHENCE KNOWEST THOU ME? JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HIM, BEFORE THAT PHILIP CALLED THEE, WHEN THOU WAST UNDER THE FIG TREE, I SAW THEE.

—JOHN 1:47-48.

I LOAFE AND INVITE MY SOUL;
I LEAN AND LOAFE AT MY EASE, OBSERVING
A SPEAR OF SUMMER GRASS.

—WALT WHITMAN

NATHANAEL

I once beneath the fig tree sat
  And stolidly gazed before me;
The branches wove a purple mat
  Upon the grass upbore me.

The wistful breezes whispered much
  Amongst the leaves above me;
They brushed my temples with a touch
  Gentle as they did love me.

I sighed and watched from out the West
  Her sun-dipt clouds come sailing:
They brought no gladness to my breast
  And passed all unavailing.

Night broidered stars upon the buff;
  She slipt in threads of sombre;
She smoothed the places day wore rough
  With silken-raveled slumber.

I once beneath the fig tree sat;
  The earth danced as it listed:
Why should I marvel aught thereat
  If sun or shadow kissed it?

I found not God in sun or shade,
  Nor felt His arms about me;
I saw no wonder He had made
  Within nor yet without me.

He spake not from the leaves aloud;
  He breathed not in the grasses;
Nor rested on a single cloud
  From the far western passes.

I sat beneath the fig tree long,
  And as I lingered dreaming
Awoke in me a sudden song
  And shone a splendid gleaming.

I did forget the things of earth,
  I felt but this new wonder:
There fell the stroke of my soul-birth
  Like lightning without thunder.

It set God in the cloud-girt sky,
  It reached me His embraces,
Nor heard I winds swift rushing by,
  But God spake in their places.

Father, let greater wonders be
  To speed my soul the faster:
O Philip, hast thou called for me?
  And hast Thou seen, O Master?

THE SON

".....he hath declared him."—John 1:18.

He had the strength and hardihood
  To live eternal life in clay,
And shines the Light of men for good,
  Who saw the light on Christmas Day.

With faith like flintstone He dared claim
  The filial heart and hand and lip,
Who gave unto the Father His name,
  And to all men a sweet kinship.

Why fall we short of Him so near?
  Why are we lesser sons than He?
Abide we mortal for we fear
  To put on immortality?

COR PATENS

Give us to seek,
Benign Light of Ages,
The Word reechoed
From prophet to prophet
And people to people
Since Babel's disleaving;
The anvil-wrought Word,
Life and death bartered,
Butterfly-fragile,
Give us to seek,
Discriminative,
But, oh, with fair,
With open heart:

That these we deny not,
These flames from the fire
Of all Great Endeavor,
But feed with our souls
And fan with our spirits
Until the red tongues
Leaping upward and upward
Lick at the very
Footstool of God—

Gautama,
Lao-Tsze,
Zarathustra,
Socrates,
Kung-Fu-Tse,
Mohamet,
Moses,
Isaiah,
Christ.

TRUTH

To Thee mid singing woods
  I'd dedicate again,
O Lord of Lofty Moods,
  Myself not all in vain.

Lord of the Hidden Heart,
  Lord of the Reverent Hand,
Let not the dreams depart
  We failed to understand.

Warm fancies of the Child
  And deep desires of Youth
Are not all lies but wild
  Surmises at the Truth.

When stark realities
  Turn gall and bitter bane,
The fairy rings on leas
  Will fairy rings remain.

SYNTHESIS

This is dust—that soul:
  Can ye ever mingle,
Pour into one whole,
  Purposeful and single?

Vision, look within!
  Eyes, O gaze about you!
Dust, what starry kin!
  Soul, what is without you?

Would 'twere only true,—
  And not merely dreaming,—
That I saw and knew
  Truth before me gleaming.

Speak, Truth, that sustaineth!
  Is God dust—the Whole?
And soul God? Remaineth,
  Man is dust and soul.

PREVISION

I.

"How shall I clothe me?" sighed my soul
In dim prenatal days.
"Shall I take to bird with scarlet wings
That mid green leafage sits and sings
For my delight his lays?"

II.

"How shall I clothe me?" sighed my soul.
"What shining raiment wear?
Shall I float into a flower shape,
Half loath, half eager to escape,
Yet not imprisoned there?"

III.

"How shall I clothe me?" sighed my soul,
Hovering close above.
"I'll creep in a nursling's rosy breast
To laugh in his eyes, and tenderly rest,
And be a mother's love."

THE TREE OF LIFE

I.

Life is a tree bears joy and grief,
  Bitter and sweet, old wood and new;
From blossoming to falling leaf,
  There are so many things to do.

II.

The tree of life has where to rest:
  I gather both of good and sin,
And build me there a dearling nest
  To put my callow nestlings in.

TOUCHSTONES

When poets have their wishes,—
  Poet, can you foresee?—
May God provide the good taste
  And nice conscience for me!

I'll stow into my knapsack
  The one safely away;
I'll wear one like a jewel
  For the wise folk to say:

"The light yon traveler flashes
  With his own heart's blood glows;
By it he proves the best things,
  And chooses as he goes."

When mystic shadows lengthen
  And rough roads fetch an end,
I'll lay aside what jewel
  Or eye may apprehend.

But what thou apprehendest,
  O gift of gifts supreme,
Has set me over mountain
  And over giddy stream;

As over earth and heaven
  It shall escort me then,
Where more God's will is reckoned,
  And less the will of men.

MOTTO

Pity the need but not the needy;
Revile the greed but not the greedy.
Beneath the need, below the greed,
A soul is biding: Soul, God-speed!

CREDO

I hold the soul immaculate,
Immutable and more than Fate.
These hands will stain, these eyes grow dim,
My soul hath never interim.

I strew Life's ashes over it—
The white heat glows as newly lit;
My soul from the Eternal came,
And I shall perish in its flame.

THE COVENANT

Comrades are we, my soul, together,
    Then let us make a pact today:
When thou shalt break this mortal tether
    And scamper over the stars away,

Remember there was one who cherished
    Thy celestial mould awhile,
And though with bird and flower he perished,
    He quit the stirrups with a smile;

He knew thy worth and gave thee rein,
    So tumbling overmuch in the dust—
Thou'lt not forget when free again
    That clumsy equerry, I trust.

LOITERING

The road is not so long
  But I could wish it longer,
Where medlark lifts his song
  To make my soul the stronger.

A snail's pace is too fast
  While sunshine keeps beside me;
The pleasure will but last
  Until death's shadows hide me.

I love all earthly things,
  Such comfort's in the lowly:
I want no angel wings,
  But let me climb up slowly.

LIKE SWALLOWS

Like swallows over a crystal lake
  We skim the crust of things,
And see but shadows that we make
  On blue-girt glimmerings.

And the expanse we hang above,
  So close our bosoms touch,
That mirrors us and all we love
  And cherish overmuch—

It is God's vast eternity
  Unruffled by our breath
Till over us it close when we
  Plunge under it in death.

A CHANT FOR EASTER

The strength of the land lies in my bones,
  The sap of the soil leaps in my veins,
There ring in my ears remembered tones
  Like seashell echoes from ancient mains.

My nostrils suck the life-giving air
  That pins me down with velvety paw:
I'm of earth earthy—it is my flair,
  And flesh and blood to me are law.

I flow with the river that rides to sea;
  I grow with the grass that lifts the sod;
I cry for a god, He comes to me:
  Out of the earth there rises my God.

I feel a kinship with the things
  That creep and crawl and leap and fly:
God's angels have no need of wings—
  Shall not my soul be lifted high?

SKY CHANTEY

I've missed the more ephemeral things
  This lifetime has to give:
My spirit cherished unclipped wings
  And joyed to soar and live.

I might have danced more with the girls,
  And with the boys chummed more,
But air-rammed the propeller whirls
  And drives me from earth's shore.

My bark must steer a loftier course;
  I chose not, heaven knows:
My destiny is mine perforce,
  O how it blows and blows!

Tree, field and hill they drop away:
  The air builds under me
A firm foundation and a stay
  Of high-piled masonry.

I clatter in the silences,
  I thunder in the cloud;
I see the earth for what it is
  With all its pigmy crowd.

O it is but a fairy land
  On which I'm eagling down!
Doll-houses for an elfish band
  Make up a play-toy town.

Above an unsubstantial floor
  I shift with my machine,
While fluid earth and heaven pour
  In one unending scene.

I have prevision of a sun
  That is no dial for time;
Where rest and motion are as one,
  And space not less sublime.

WINGS

My soul, still in the dark cocoon
  Earth's spell holds thee in slumber,
And cycles of the sun and moon
  With weight of time encumber.

Wilt wonder at thy sudden bliss,
  Ecstatically seeing,
When thou shalt burst from chrysalis
  Into the fuller being?

O maiden soul, where sunbeams glance
  And the faint bee hummeth,
Thou weavest thee a rose corance
  Before the Bridegroom cometh.

Thou weavest and thou dreamest so,
  Till dream to truth fulfilleth;
And truth shall come ere dream will go,
  As rose on rosebud thrilleth.

The wings thou dost anticipate,
  From flush to pallor flying,
They more shall marvel at their state
  Than thou athwart them lying.

EPILOGUE

For worms this book is food,
  And food for worms this hand,
This eye that deems all good,
  Even the brain that planned:

Yet ere this halting book
  To dust again return,
If it but make to look,
  One spirit make to yearn

Beyond the printed page,
  Beyond the feeble pen,
Out of a worm-eat age
  To an incorruptible when,

I care not for the rest,
  Nor shall my soul complain
The moths have made a nest,
  And I my book in vain.

RESUME:

A Sonnet Non-Sequence

TIME GOES, YOU SAY? AH, NO!
ALAS, TIME STAYS. WE GO.

—AUSTIN DOBSON

LE TEMPS S'EN VA, LE TEMPS
S'EN VA, MADAME!
LAS! LE TEMPS NON : MAIS
NOUS. NOUS EN ALLONS!

—RONSARD

NUR ALLEIN DER MENSCH
VERMAG DAS UNMOEGLICHE;
ER UNTERSCHEIDET,
WAEHLET UND RICHTET,
ER KANN DEM AUGENBLICK
DAUER VERLEIHEN.

—GOETHE

I.

Succeeding ages sum up ages past;
We live and are the sum of all before,
Not of our own lives only but of more
Than earth can give or moulded clay hold fast.
A star through broken clouds sums up the vast
And stilly depths between us and the shore
Of crystal space no thought adventures o'er.
Pale thoughts sum up what dreams iconoclast!
From winter's bleak the leaves of summer come,
And out of spring enchantments fruits of fall;
Gems hold the land and sea in tiny span;
Fair Helen of proud Graecia was the sum;
A touch is sum of love; a breath of man;
Death sums up life; but God is sum of all.

II.

There is a region which our sunset glow
Foreshadows only: pale cloud cannot wane
Into its pure translucence; swallow gain
On urgent wing; rose petals cannot blow;
Through those far reaches piping wind can go
Ah, never! never sea sound; peak attain;
Bird song melt into it; nor will, nor brain,
By taking thought, alas! can ever know.
What magic cleaves this world from that asunder?
My soul leaps in the breach: amazed I stand
So close to imminent perpetual wonder
That straining at the ring of sense's spell
I tremble on the verge of faery land,
And burst the mesh of the invisible.

III.

April i' the year and April in your eyes:
The peach crops out a riot of live pink
To match your girl's complexion as I think;
While lark flings Joy like silver as he flies
To test if she be perfect; stealthy-wise
Willow takes on a pale transparent green,
And cherry—piled and pearly cloud—unseen
Floats off dissolved into the filmy skies.
Down his long course the palpitating brook
Throbs hurriedly, but he will stop to look
Where alders deck them after winter's lean
And Puritan sedateness.—Soon ah! grief
Your cheeks, and sun will bronze their infant sheen;
A deeper tinge will fix upon the leaf.

IV.

The twilight wears spring posies at her breast,—
Saffron and red,—whose fresh-blent colors tinge,
As did her rosy fingertips impinge
With their own hue, the curling undercrest
Of blue-black clouds like deep-sluiced waves upturned;
A locust clump in wavy silhouette,
New leaf and branch, across the sky discerned,
Sinks into velvety depths nor green nor jet;
The turf's obscurer chiaroscuros fade,
Whilst upstart ripples i' the burnished stream
Are on the instant chased in silver, blade
Over blade outflung so shadowed in its gleam:
A sweet bird in his covert feels it all,
And gives it voice in May-found madrigal.

V.

Now dogwood's evanescent radiance wanes;
Oak quits her silver-simulating glory;
Frost treads no more white-foot, but naiad rains
Skip 'cross the grasses, tinkling, transitory.
The furtive chewink now calls lispingly;
The catbird plays at echo just for fun;
A warbler's sudden burst of melody
Thrills downward sudden ended as begun.
Over and over aureate oriole
Turns doubtful ode till't come to his mind,
Ere its full resonance ring from his soul
Clear as true poet's message to mankind.
For all her bliss spring at the untried task
Knows not the mellower wine in summer's cask.

VI.

Never so fair as here mid rain I saw
Wheatfield and wood in terraced crest on crest
Rise up against the purple-curtained west
So deep in tone they move my heart to awe.
Down Locust Lane there rustles a silken flaw;
And shingle-clinging pigeons lift their wings
Unto the shower, whilst some robin sings,
"Thou never wert so fair, O Revonah!"
On such a day are spring and summer met;
Their moist eyes speaking more than words can say,
Or gazing wide where sullen thunders fret.
Do you remember, friend, we such a day
From Concord took the green-grass Walden way,
And gathered Thoreau's daisies dripping wet?

VII.

Eheu! Eheu! Why do you mock me, dove?
What happier days remembered do you mourn?
Lamenting with a longdrawn sob forlorn,
And with a sigh like Psyche's when she strove
Through all the world, outsighing very Love?
O sorrow, nigh and yonder art thou borne,
A goat song on the wind, a grief the worn
Set edges of the earth are matrix of.
You've stripped the mask from falsehood and from
sin?
You've pierced to beauty's naked soul like me?
I marvel not at human pangs within
Your feathered breast then,—sad futility!—
Still moaning for the things have never been,
Still longing for the things shall never be.

VIII.

If flowers can speak, your speech how eloquent!
How sweetly sweet the language you possess!
Nor on the idle wind your words be spent,
But whisper to my heart their loveliness.
If flowers do feel, you tremble at my touch
Because you know as lovers wont to know
That by these lips I love you overmuch
And by these fingers which caress you so.
If flowers have thoughts, my mind has not the wit
To search the tender thoughts in you do lie,
As blushing gladden gently when they flit
Across her cheeks or light a maiden's eye.
If flowers have souls, is Heaven's of such as these;
If they have none, I give mine to sweet peas.

IX.

O valleyed town wed to the near blue hills,
Singing your work-day song from morn till night,
The sheer dawn at your panes like the love-light
In lovers' eyes intrigues my soul and thrills;
All through the hours the busy hum of mills
And various din blend into music, quite
Hushed when at even the blue slopes fold you tight
Beneath the stars, and lovers have their wills.
The hills, the purple hills that know such bliss,
One moves and has her being 'neath their blue,
Whose loveliness your suns and breezes kiss;
Your dust, dear town, is on her garment's hem,
And when I pray, my prayers are turned to you,
My Mecca, yes, and my Jerusalem.

X.

October, golden-aureoled and calm,
Deft fingers all a-stain, with Turner zest,
Dips brush upon the palette of the West,
When the sun swoons unto a sparrow's psalm
In vivid death, and daubs each leaf and haulm,
Breathing a fragrance round Spring's empty nest
And where the topping apple ruddiest
Drops at a touch into the uptilt palm.
Or in rich tapestries corn-plumed she weaves
Mouth-melting pear and aromatic quince,
Lush new green wheat on which her footstep glints,
Dim boskage alleys where All-hallow Eves
She rains ripe nuts, and slowly-sifted leaves
Of some sublimer theme imparting hints.

XI.

I would not be so happy thus forever,
Not quietly, dispassionately happy thus;
(Such happiness comes not by our endeavor,
But like the rain from heaven pours over us):
As throstle's piping to his solitude
Encomiums of golden dust and sun,
Or mellow joy of mothers with their brood,
Or gentle pleasures worn folk dote upon
Of ancient wars and loves and old romance
Got second-hand from books, still pictured things,
And mimic plays we share not, song and dance—
Contentments long have folded tired wings.
Yea, I would haste the turning in the lane,
And then look back, and live it through again.

XII.

Benignly proud you are—you stand aloof
Like the hard splendor of a winter morning,
When the first sun will give himself to proof,
And multiply his lights for earth's adorning,—
Turning the frozen weed to stiff festoons
Of opal sparks, and setting on each tree
Barbaric crust to gleam like golden moons;
Topaz and amber the spilt jewelry
Between us and the east; westward besprent
Green emeralds flash and lustrous chrysoprase,
Clear chalcedony, diamonds' scintillent
White fires, and turquoise flames of skyey space:
So dazzling us he does the while withhold
His kissing warmth for brilliance all cold.

XIII.

White bees are on the wing, their flight as brief
As petals dropt, down-slanting without sound:
O theirs a sum of silences profound,
A multitudinous hush, passing belief!
In whose mute throng am I caught like a thief,
Pelted and stung and blinded, while around
They seek in apathy the barren ground,
As they had lost their stings and come to grief.
Cold, silent winter bees, wan wraiths of bees,
Pale bees that swarm and cluster with no queen,—
My soul can never mingle one with these;
But goes like flaming cardinal that's seen
Intact, lone-darting in and out between,
Amid the fleecy napery of the trees.

XIV.

The little golden bird i' the rusty cage
To ecstasy abandoning his soul
Spills forth 'tween tarnished bars the quivering whole
In honied repetitions of fine rage;
Through crystal filmy-finned goldfish assuage,
And glorify existence in a bowl
With living lines of light; the air takes toll
Of balm that bruised geranium foliage
From painted can exhales; and blithely she,
The radiant guardian angel of it all,
Of flashing globe, of bird and flower, care-free,
Does at her household tasks untrammled ply.
On such their narrow confines never pall;
They are content: so would to God were I!

XV.

By your own charnel vault where empty skull
And hollow bone and grinning antique mask
Under the cold beam of reflection bask
So leprous-white when she is at her full,
There cheek by jowl lag you in horrible
Soul-shrieking silence, of the urgent task
Making a mockery, while you dumbly ask
The adumbrated shadows mid a lull:
"Dread creatures of the will, can I create
Your grisly shapes for banter or for gloom
To immortality beyond the tomb;
Fashion a world and not annihilate
Gehenna-wise, but needs must drag its weight
With Atlas through unending depths of doom?"

XVI.

When I think back upon the long years spent,
On bitterness and joy, on sun and cloud,
I fain would drape them in a silent shroud
And quite forget, but quickly me repent,
Come second thought, for all that they have meant
I count not any cost: who once so proud,
Scornful did pick my steps mid meek heads bowed,
I am as grass, O God, my head is bent.
Nor would I spare one single darkling mood:
By feverish doubt in watches of the night,
By panting day's fateful vicissitude,
I come to know, to feel with confidence
As thick earth's shadows lie so keen the Light,
As deep the vale so high Love's eminence.

XVII.

What woeful waste of worlds, what waste of man!
What wanton waste of precious nard and oil!
How many a canvas does the Painter soil,
And scratch how many a line which He began!
We question is it chance or is it plan
That we in futile practise spend and spoil
Our best endeavors to unpurposed toil.
Nay, close not in—draw farther off and scan:
The master-strokes in one design leap out,
None failing and none finished, but they mend
In making ever, ever grow and live.
It's so with all great works—can there be end
To God's creation? Ask, but never doubt
What answer in the pauses He will give.

XVIII.

God's penchant is unequally to dower;
With works Him to adore, to strive, to grow,
Our great privilege. This alone we know;
For this in Beauty some, and some in Power,
And some in Love burn out their passion's hour—
In divers ways His creatures come and go:
The rapt bird sings because he worships so,
And adoration's aves breathe i' the flower.
To be ourselves is offering enough;
Our gift supreme that potency called soul
To lift unasked unto the enduring Whole.
Quick throat and thrust of color I surmise
Not all strange, transient, and extraneous stuff
In level front of the All-Father's eyes.

XIX.

It cannot be that I am growing old—
Moonlight, romance and roses still my dream!
That is not age. I face the present scheme
All my boy loves undimmed: sure I behold
With the first rapture marching clouds unfold
Their pageantry; take fire from the gleam
Of girlish cheeks and eyes, and still esteem
The long cascading locks of jet or gold.
True frankness and fine reticence that mate;
Carrara-white December, leafy June;
The simple melody that's played in tune—
These things sufficing me are out of date?
Then was I born a hundred years too late,
Or possibly a hundred years too soon.

XX.

That time shall come my favorite sunflecked way,
Where scarlet pimpernel and bitter yarrow
Mark summer's prime and rufous-crested sparrow
Hour after hour trills his unchanging lay,
No more will feel my tread, but on a day
The crack of doom shall strike into my marrow
Its boom, boom, boom of fate—the arrow
Of life is spent, and falls far, far astray.
So having reached that winter of my years,
With cold eyes let me wake and deep immerse
My senses in soul-dreams, like one who hears
The wind's kiss or birdsong among the trees
Or ebb and flow of God's vast universe
Surge through Beethoven's immortal symphonies.

XXI.

Long after school-boy days the morning bell
Tugs at the dull heart unawares with pain,
Or joy, or both commingled—all in vain;
Mid fireside dreams old Echo feels the spell
Of the hard chase; pale maple leaves will tell
In thirsty chatter somewhat of past rain,
And sidewise turn with thinking on again:
O sexton Memory that rings the knell
Of our dead thoughts eternally, perchance
There are more graves, more secret hidden places
I' the mind's deep catacombs than at first glance
Appear? On monuments what idle finger traces
Half of the half-told imperishable romance?
Who sees the never-to-be-forgotten faces?....